



GAMES AND RECREATIONS SERIES

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FISHING



*Frontispiece*

THE AUTHOR  
(Photo: Elliott & Fry)

# FISHING

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO  
FRESHWATER ANGLING

*By*

ERNEST A. ARIS, F.Z.S., S.G.A.

CONTRIBUTOR TO

"GAME AND GUN," "THE FISHING GAZETTE," "SOUTH AFRICAN  
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*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR*



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## FOREWORD

MY DEAR ARIS,

You pay me a compliment in asking me to write a foreword to your book "Fishing."

You are always interesting on anything about fish and catching them, especially Bream and Roach. I am pretty safe in saying that any angler who consults your book is bound to pick up a good few wrinkles about fishing for them. He will find right pleasant reading with some very interesting and beautiful pen-and-ink drawings, which will well repay any time spent in the perusal of your book.

I could say much more, but will not trespass on valuable space; for it is you the reader wants to hear—not me.

J. C. RIGBY,

EDITOR, *The Angler's News*.

RICHMOND, SURREY.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with pleasure and grateful thanks that I acknowledge the courtesies of the following—

J. C. Rigby for his kindly foreword, and his permission to reprint excerpts from my articles in *The Angler's News*.

Messrs. Allcock of Redditch for use of blocks in my chapter on tackle.

B. Kettle for the use of his excellent photographs.

*The Fishing Gazette* for permission to reprint from my articles.

ERNEST A. ARIS

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# FISHING

## INTRODUCTION

*"There is nothing that attracts human nature more powerfully than the sport of tempting the unknown with a fishing-line."*—HENRY VAN DYKE.

I WAS catching fish at six years old; so I can truthfully say that I have been an angler for fifty years. It is my object to set down in simple language, in this book on "Fishing," the fishing lore I have acquired during these many years. If there has been a difficulty in writing this book it has been to get coherence into an overwhelming mass of data. This, I think, I have accomplished. What I have written is for the beginner, and I have assumed that he knows nothing of rods, tackle, or fish. Consequently, I have, with some effort, left out much fishing lore, minor incidents on the river-bank, carefree conversations, and spontaneous friendships; little things, but dear to the type of mind that goes to make a fisherman. So I ask the reader to look upon this book as an A.B.C. of fishing.

After his first season with the best of masters, the river, the angler—I call him the angler now—will begin to think for himself, and the tackle manufacturers' catalogues will occupy a great part of his reading. I have fished in many parts of the world, but the tactics employed in fishing are the same everywhere. So it is important that the beginner should thoroughly absorb this A.B.C. and regard what may seem to him trivial things as being possibly of the utmost importance.

The vagaries of fishing are such that one often has to

improvise, to change one's tactics to the conditions of the day or "swim." One cannot do this without a good basic knowledge of the habits of the fish and tactics required. These things I have endeavoured to set down.

Every man at some time in his life has fished. It may have been with a jar and net or with a bent pin; but he has succumbed to the lure of fishing.

What is the attraction of fishing? Is it part of our island heritage or is it the gambling instinct aroused by the unknown quantity?

How fascinating is the movement of the float! How thrilling when it dips and with what eagerness one surmises the cause of it! No, there is no boredom in fishing; every moment is anticipated, time ceases to be, and one is far away from the clash of industrial strife, in a world of contentment where the cares of a workaday world cease to be. In fishing, anticipation is the pleasure; the capture the thrill.

Besides, fishing is good for one, both mentally and physically. It takes one to pleasant places, far from the madding crowd, where one is alone with the civil society of the trees and the wild creatures, to breathe the pure air of sleepy fragrant meadows.

If there is a haven of bliss,  
It is this, it is this.

And so to our fishing.

## CHAPTER I

### TACKLE

THE successful angler is invariably tackle-proud. Articles of tackle are legion and to mention everything, with all its varieties, would make this book a manufacturer's catalogue. So be it understood by the reader that I am



FIG. 1. THE "GLORIA," A GOOD GENERAL ROD

A well-balanced 3-joint, light reed cane rod, spliced middle joint, top spliced with built cane (ensuring a rapid strike), agate butt and end rings, cork handle, close green whippings, bronzed sliding winch fitting, screw butt cap.

(Messrs. Allcock)

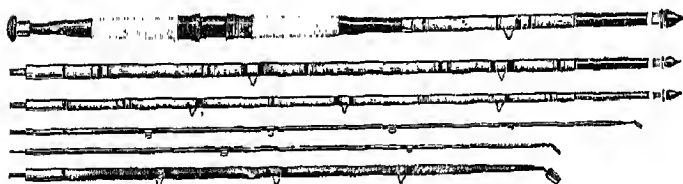


FIG. 2. THE "BICKERDYKE" COMBINATION ROD

A 4-joint selected cane rod with three greenheart tops, reversible butt with detachable wood button, cork handle, double-braced snake rings, porcelain end ring on stout top, bronzed solid winch fitting. Makes up into 13 or 14 ft. roach-rod, 10 ft. pike spinning or light sea-rod, 9 ft. punt-rod, 8 ft. bream- or ledgering-rod, 5 ft. sea or bait-casting rod.

(Messrs. Allcock)

writing for the beginner in his first season—detailing only that which is necessary for successful fishing.

### The Rod

The choice of rod is largely a matter of personal taste, and will be influenced by the pleasure one may expect



to get out of it; but, whatever type of rod it is, let it be good and essentially suitable for the style of fishing one wishes to practise. The beginner is rarely a specialist: all he wants is to catch fish, any fish. A single rod, with a reel, a float, and a few hooks generally satisfies his early requirements. Later, as he progresses with his fishing, he finds the need of more ambitious tackle and will want a fly-rod, casting-rod, punt-rod, and probably a roach-pole.

To begin with, I would advise a good general rod (Fig. 1)—three joints, stiffish, split cane or greenheart top joint, fitted with bridged rings, cork handle with a light, large-barrelled reel, length 12 ft. to 14 ft. This was my first rod and I still use it. On the other hand, the beginner might well start with a combination rod (Fig. 2). This rod will enable him to indulge in various styles of fishing without further expenditure in the way of rods. Before the War such rods were available for a couple of guineas, or even less; unfortunately at the present time prices are necessarily somewhat enhanced, but bargains in second-hand rods can usually be picked up. The roach-pole is dealt with in a later chapter.

### **Tackle for Bottom Fishing**

Apart from the rod the beginner will require reel and line, hooks (various sizes), gut casts, split shot (mixed sizes), creel or bag, landing-net, keep-net, rod-rests, line-winders, plummet (to ascertain depth of water), ledger leads, small scissors or knife, spring-balance, small pliers for pinching on shot, wallet to contain hooks and gut lengths, lead wire, floats and float-caps, and stool. A swan's feather cut into  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. lengths makes excellent float-caps: as the feather gets thinner the size of the cut portions get smaller, thus giving a variety of sizes. Rubber boots for wet days and winter fishing are essential.

## The Reel

Reels are made in a great variety, from the old wooden ones to the modern "fixed spool." As they all answer the purpose more or less admirably, the choice is again largely a personal one. My own particular favourite is the "Flick 'em" (Fig. 3), which is excellent both for casting and for trotting a float.

## Lines

For all kinds of float fishing I have found an undressed plaited silk line to be excellent in every way. It should be as fine as possible, with due regard to the size of the fish one is out to get. A 2 lb. to 4 lb. breaking strain is a good all-round line. Lines should never be put away wet, as this causes them quickly to rot. My particular way of drying a line is to hang it on the clothes-drying rack above the fire-place in the kitchen. There it quickly dries and is out of the way of cats, dogs, and mice; a line that has been greased is an attraction to mice. The portion of the line that has been used on a previous day's fishing should always be tested.

## Floats

Floats, of which there are innumerable varieties, are most fascinating things. Personally, although I have dozens, I can never resist buying a new one. The size

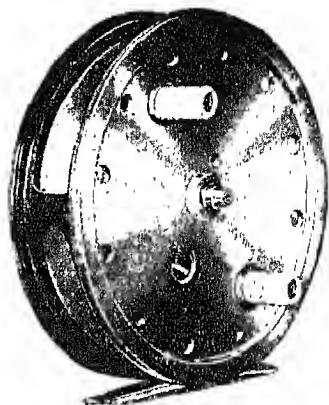


FIG. 3. THE "FLICK 'EM" REEL  
Centre-pin type, made of aluminium  
alloy, fitted with a tension adjuster and  
optional ratchet check  
(Messrs. Allcock)

and shape are governed by the style of fishing and the size of fish one expects to catch. I am very partial to celluloid floats. They are light, easily seen—as must needs be—and respond to the slightest touch. They will carry a fair number of shot, which is essential in moving water, in order that the bait may be quickly carried down to the required depth. They are admirable for long casting. The colouring of the float, too, is of some importance; my own particular taste in this respect is for a red-tipped

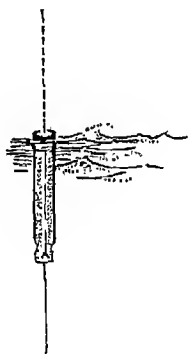


FIG. 4. THE ANTENNA  
FLOAT



FIG. 5. THE SLIDER  
FLOAT

float with  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. white below, that portion which is under the water being coloured green, to resemble a reed. These colours I have found good for all lights. Black may be substituted for red, but the red is most conspicuous against dark-green reflections in the water. Whatever colour the angler fancies, it is most essential that the tip of the float should be distinctly seen, especially with a long cast, or in "trotting down." The antenna float (Fig. 4) is a great asset in stormy weather. The antenna, offering little or no resistance to the wind,

remains visible when the rest of the float is under water. There are also cork floats, self-cocking floats, weighted with shot inside, luminous floats for night fishing (these should not be packed away when not in use, for to give out light they must absorb light), slider floats (Fig. 5) for deep-water fishing, and pilot floats, used in pike fishing with the famous "Fishing Gazette" cork float.

### Hooks

The beginner will purchase hooks attached to the hook-link. This will ensure the right thickness of gut for the

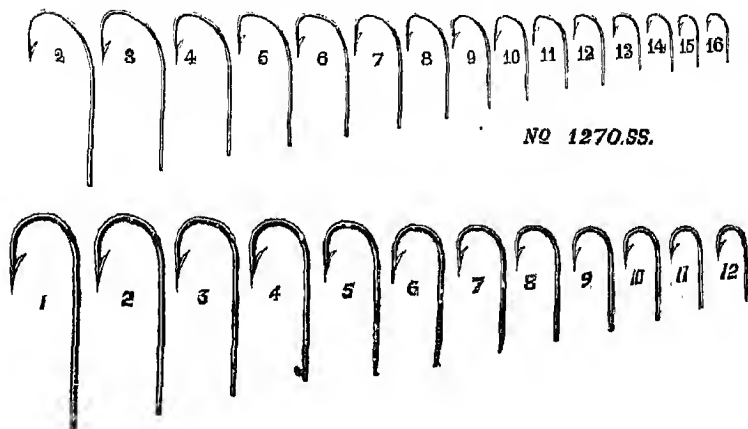


FIG. 6. HOOK SIZES  
Top: Crystal Roach. Bottom: Carlisle Round Bend.  
(Messrs. Allcock)

size of the hook. Except in certain cases, such as fishing for live bait, when small fish are required, or in hemp-fishing, the small hook, in my experience, is a mistake. To put a big bait, such as a lob or a large knob of paste, on a small hook is utterly wrong. In the first place the bait will soon fall off, and, even if it remains on the hook

long enough to engage a fish, the fish in nine cases out of ten will get away without contact with the hook. Even if the angler succeeds in landing his fish, it generally means a most unpleasant surgical operation. When fishing with a small red worm, however—red worms are mostly small—a small hook, No. 12, is essential. This bait will take large fish, so the strike must be instantaneous to avoid the surgical operation, especially with regard to perch. But on the whole I have found that the larger the bait the larger the fish, and the hook should therefore be strictly in keeping with the size of the bait.

The illustration (Fig. 6) gives the relative sizes of hooks, shown in what is known as "the Redditch numbers." This is the most universally used scale. (See also Fig. 52).

For general float-fishing, I have found little occasion to use anything below No. 6 or above No. 14, though when float-fishing for pike with a single hook the larger sizes could be effectively used. From No. 12 to No. 14 are suitable for hemp-fishing, and for this fishing I prefer the crystal or sneck bend hook. For large lob, a No. 6 is required. No. 9 is my favourite hook, with which I have taken every kind of freshwater fish, except salmon, including fish up to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  lb. This hook is suitable for bread-crust, paste, and maggots, and will hold a fair-sized worm.

## The Stool

When float-fishing "near in," the angler should never stand up. He should always bear in mind that his presence is a menace to the fish. Besides, to stand all day is physically tiring. To sit on the ground in winter is mighty unpleasant and in summer the presence of ants can give one a most distressing time: this from experience! Therefore a stool is essential.

I have tried many stools, but the safest and the most durable are the folding wooden ones. The wire contraptions I have no use for. They are all right for a time, but quickly get bent, especially on uneven ground, and ground is mostly uneven. The canvas portion quickly gives way and lets the angler down, and he is lucky if he falls backwards. A small cushion greatly adds to one's comfort, for sitting on even the best of stools for long periods is not exactly armchair comfort.

### Care of Tackle

Lines should be dried after use. After a wet day of fishing your rod should be wiped dry, the rings and ferrules greased, and reels oiled.

The case, too, should be dried, also the fishing-pack: nets left damp quickly rot. They should always be taken out of the pack and dried as soon as possible.

No baits should be left in the pack which, if wet, should be hung up to dry.

The tip or thin end of the rod should be at the top of the case, the butt or thick end at the bottom.

Hooks should be tested and examined before use. Never use a hook with the binding loose or with a frayed gut link, otherwise a good fish may be lost.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FISH

#### Roach

To the beginner four very confusing fish are roach, rudd, chub, and dace, being almost identical in habits and very similar in build. The roach (Fig. 7) is the thickest-set of this silvery quartet. Wherever fish-life occurs, whether in lake, pond, canal, or river, the roach is sure

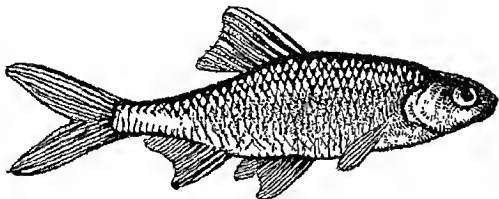


FIG. 7. ROACH (*Rutilus rutilus*)

The Record is 3 lb. 14 oz. from a reservoir at Hampton, Middlesex, in 1938  
(Mr. W. Penny).

to be found. The mature fish is strikingly handsome, with its silvery scales, red eyes and fins, and red-tinged tail. The back is dark, of a bluish olive-green colour, the sides silvery, merging into white towards the under-belly. It is a most prolific breeder, so much so that when introduced into a smallish pond the water becomes so overcrowded that the food becomes scarce and a dwarf race is produced. Consequently these small fish—they rarely exceed  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb.—are very easily caught. Apparently always hungry, they lose their habitual caution and are easy prey, even to the small boy with a willow-wand rod. It is no unusual event to catch a hundred in a day of fishing, providing, of course, that the conditions of the day are

right, for even small fish are influenced by climatic conditions.

Roach are gregarious, that is, they swim in shoals. Its fighting qualities and the fact that it is always to be found, make it the most popular of all freshwater fish. It varies in weight from ounces to pounds, a  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. fish being the average capture, although specimens of 1 lb. are not uncommon. A 2 lb. fish is a good capture, though fish up to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  lb. have been caught. An angler may fish a lifetime without capturing a two-pounder. Although I have caught thousands of roach, it is only this last season or so that this coveted prize has fallen to my rod. It would seem, therefore, that these big fellows are not easy of capture.

Of late years, captures of large roach have been more frequent than of yore. Maybe tackle has improved, and anglers are not now so callous about fish-life and have learnt that fish are not in the water solely to be hooked. The keep-net, I am sure, has improved matters in this respect; for the fish can be returned *alive* to grow bigger. Roach are, at times, bold and rapacious feeders, though not with the voracity of the perch.

The beginner must not think that because small roach are easy to catch sizable roach are equally easily caught. They are not. In fact the successful roach-fisher exercises the greatest finesse, using only the finest tackle. Whatever others say to the contrary, roach-fishing is an art. Roach may be caught by either float-fishing, ledgering, or tight-lining, float-fishing being the style mostly used. These methods will be explained in a later chapter. Roach feed on or very near the bottom and will take a variety of baits; most baits will, at one time or another, bring about their capture. Bread-crusts, paste, maggots, caddis, worms, hemp and elderberries, and water-fleas



are mostly used. The biggest take of roach I ever saw was with a fly, one summer-time on a Lincolnshire drain, when the fish were on the surface. My own favourite method, in still water, is laying-on or float-ledgering. One certainly gets the bigger fish by this method, though, perhaps, not quite so many fish. The bait, being on the bottom, is where the fish expect to find it, and it is therefore above suspicion.

In running water the bait is more effective just off the bottom, but great care must be taken in seeing that this depth is maintained, *especially in tidal waters*. Should the bait rise even though only an inch or two, the biting will cease. *Therefore the plummet must be in constant use*. Occasionally checking the float on its downward course causes the bait to lift momentarily, and this, as often as not, tempts the fish. At the end of the swim allow the float to be carried towards the bank; this often brings results. In drawing out the line to recast do so very slowly, for an apparently escaping bait is invariably too much for a feeding fish.

Roach spawn in the spring, from March onwards, so during the summer months they are not in the best of condition, being somewhat flabby and slimy. Pond roach are in this condition till well into October. Many roach fishers do not start fishing till October.

In fishing for roach the beginner must recognize that the fish are wild, shy, and wise. He must keep out of sight and make the minimum of movement. The fish may not be in the "swim" at the moment of starting to fish, so the angler must attract them by ground-baiting. Do not get impatient, it may be some time before the fish find the bait. Once they are in the "swim" it is the angler's business to keep them there. This is done by throwing in small quantities of ground-bait every now

and then, especially when the biting seems to flag. It is a great mistake to ground-bait a "swim" and then leave it because the fish do not respond immediately. By using a bait that is not usual to the water, a poor day may be turned into a successful one.

Quite recently, I was fishing a noted hemp water. A strong wind blew up-stream—generally fatal so far as fishing is concerned, though in still waters a strong south-west wind gives excellent sport. I was using hemp as bait. I did not get a bite all day. By four o'clock I had decided to pack, when for a last swim down I put on a cube of bread-crust. The response was immediate, and I had a most hectic half-hour's sport netting eight lovely fish. A similar experience in the same water on a very hot summer's day resulted in my keep-net being full. This time I used water-fleas in lieu of hemp. So the unorthodox often pays.

Strike instantly for roach. The smaller fish give a grab-and-run bite. The float bobs quickly once or twice and the bite is over—all in a split second. The larger fish are more leisurely. At the faintest tremble of the float strike ere it slowly disappears. In netting the fish, bring it slowly but firmly out of the swim, at the same time keeping it under the surface of the water to prevent splashing—splashing warns the fish in the swim. Keep the line taut and guide the fish to the landing-net; never take the net to the fish—it alarms it and its struggles are renewed.

The times for capturing these fish vary with the conditions of the day. Sometimes, especially in hot, bright sunshiny weather on a summer's day, they bite only in the early morning or late evening. If they are feeding all day, the biting generally ceases towards evening. There may be days when the biting occurs only for a period of

an hour or even half-hour. It suddenly comes on and just as suddenly ceases. There is no doubt that the bigger fish are taken in the early morning or late evening. On a winter's day the last hours are the best times, if not the only times of biting, except on a warm, muggy, and misty day, when one may get what is called a "red-letter day."

In most, if not all, waters there is a limit to the size a roach may be retained. This is 8 in. The sportsman angler will observe this law.

### Rudd

The rudd (Fig. 8) is really a lovely fish. With its scarlet fins and tail, red eyes, olive-green, golden-tinted back

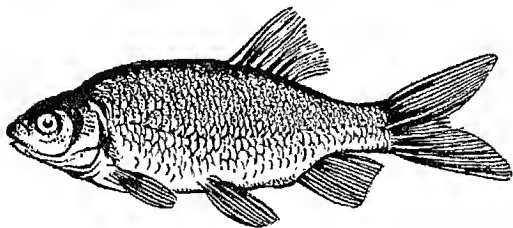


FIG. 8. RUDD (*Leuciscus erythrophthalmus*)

and silvery-blue sides merging into white, it makes the roach look quite pale. The rich colourings quickly fade at death. It is often mistaken for the roach, but there are distinct structural differences. The dorsal fin is placed much farther back, nearer the tail, than in the roach (see Fig. 9). The tail is more forked and the body is deeper in proportion to the length. It is not so widely distributed as the roach, its chief haunts being in the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads.

It is found in Broads, slow-flowing rivers, and lakes. It

is the roach of Ireland, where it abounds, but does not occur in Scotland. In habits it is gregarious. In the summer-time it is found swimming in shoals on the shallows in the vicinity of weeds. The same baits as used for roach will bring about its capture. It is also very partial to fly and will readily take an artificial one. There is a mistaken idea that rudd are solely surface-feeders and that to catch them one must fish just beneath the surface. This is quite a fallacy. They do feed near the surface, perhaps more so than the roach, dace, or chub, and they are caught just beneath the surface, but in my experience ledgering is by far the most killing

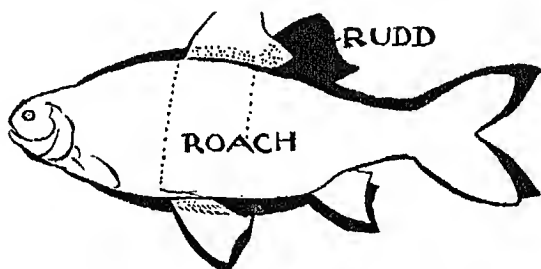


FIG. 9. SHOWING THE PHYSICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ROACH AND RUDD

method. ("Killing" is a fishing term; I dislike it intensely, rarely killing fish myself.)

In three days' fishing in the Broads, in two separate waters, I netted over two hundred rudd, not a fish under  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb., many being round about the 1 lb. mark. In both outings the fish were taken in about 3 ft. to 4 ft. of water, ledgering with lob on a No. 6 hook and at a distance of about 25 ft. out. Well, theories do not alter facts.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The picture on the cover depicts the scene where this fishing took place.

## Chub

The chub (Fig. 10) is very much like the dace, except that in the former the anal fin is convex whilst in the latter it is concave. Of the four fishes, roach, rudd, dace, and chub, the chub is the only one with a convex anal fin, and its ventral and anal fin, being red, again differ from those of the dace. Also it lacks the silvery sheen of the dace, nor is it so streamlined, its head being more blunt and its general appearance more chubby. Its eyes are not so red as those of the rudd and roach. It is very widely distributed, but is not found in Ireland or Northern Scotland. It is an omnivorous feeder and cherries, black-

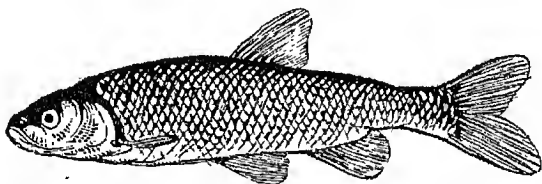


FIG. 10. CHUB (*Leuciscus cephalus*)

The Record is 8 lb. 4 oz. from the Avon (Christchurch) in 1913 (Mr. G. F. Smith).

berries, cheese-paste, maggots, caterpillars, grasshoppers, and particularly a fly, are all acceptable.

The chub spawns in the late spring and later, like its near relations, seeks the gravelly shallows to scour itself. It then retires to its habitual haunts, under steep banks in the deep holes of the swiftly running stream, and where, amidst the tangled briars, the willows and alders spring up to form a canopy overhead, almost shutting out the light from the sky. So it will be seen that the chub is not always easy of access. The Rother, the Thames, and the Hampshire Avon are typical chub waters.

Under these difficult conditions, how is one to get at the fish? The difficulty is overcome by the method known

as "sink-and-draw," which will be explained in a later chapter. Fortunately, chub streams are not all tangled briars, steep banks and overhanging trees. There are places where the river on its course enters meadow-land, where the banks are more or less level with the water. Here the angler can have easier fishing, though he must still exercise the greatest caution in approaching his "swim." To give a note of realism, let me quote from my "log" a portion of an article, "How I caught the Chub."

#### WHERE THE STREAM FLOWS INTO THE MEADOWS

"On examining this stretch of water—away from the water's edge—I found the depth at the shallow end 1 ft. and gradually deepening, till, at a distance of some 40 ft. it was 6 ft. deep, where the stream tumbled over a rock into the beyond. Picking up my general rod, I adjusted the float so as to fish at a depth of 4 ft. Baiting with a bunch of lively gentles, I cast out from behind a small bush at the shallow end of this stretch of water. Away went the float on its travels. Nearing the end of the swim I checked the float, so that the bait preceded it on its course. Suddenly, the float fairly streaked across the water. I struck and engaged a fish. Followed hectic moments. Keeping the fish well out of the swim and under the water, I gradually brought it to the net. A chub of 1 lb.

"I recast, and the float again went on its travels; at exactly the same place I struck another fish and successfully landed another chub of about the same size. Yet again I recast and brought in another fish. Finding a green caterpillar on my neck, as a result of my peregrinations in the bushes, I promptly put it on the hook, and once again sent the float on its travels. It hardly covered

a couple of yards when, down it went. This time I brought a nice dace. Followed more swims down, but with no response. I then moved on."

This is typical chub-fishing.

Although at times a voracious biter, the chub is easily scared and once scared, there is little chance of catching it. Walton described it as "the fearfulest of fishes."

## Dace

The dace is a smart, lively little fish. Though somewhat similar to the roach it is more streamlined in build and lacks the roach's red colouring. In general colour it

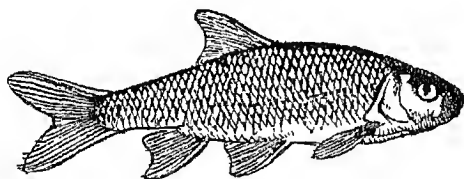


FIG. 11. DACE (*Leuciscus leuciscus*)

The Record is 1 lb. 8 oz. 5 dr. from a tributary of the Hampshire Avon in 1932  
(R. W. Humphrey).

is more silvery. It is seldom, if ever, found in still waters. Rivers and mill-streams, where the current is moderately fast, are its habitual haunts. It is very local in Ireland and does not occur in Scotland. Its natural food consists of flies, worms, and small molluscs. The dace does not attain the weight of the roach, a 1 lb. fish being considered a good specimen, although something of a rarity. Inhabiting clear running water, it is not so easily captured as the roach. It is a shy, sharp biter, so the strike must be instantaneous. The finest tackle must be used and it is of the utmost importance that the angler keeps out of sight. To catch dace in the clear, shallow water of a mill-stream requires considerable skill. The dace does

not feed so near the bottom as the roach; midstream is the general depth, although on occasions it is not averse to a red worm on the roach-fisher's ledger. It is very partial to a fly, and fly-fishing for dace is really capital sport, but as this is very unlikely to interest the beginner in his first season, I will not dwell upon it here, but in Chapter VII I will give some hints on the subject.

My first dace-fishing occurred many years ago in a Nottingham mill-stream, where the water was shallowish and crystal clear. It was here that the importance of the law of *keeping out of sight* was forced upon me. I fished in the Nottingham style, running line, trace well shotted to within 16 in. of the hook. My depth was 6 in. more than that of the water, so that the trace dragged along the bottom of the stream. By carefully checking the float on its downward course, I ensured that the bait lifted and preceded the float; the 16 in. below the shot, on which was the bait, conformed to the movement of the stream, thereby giving the bait a very natural appearance. Most bites occurred on the lifting of the bait, though, in spite of being hidden behind reeds, I seldom got a bite less than 25 ft. away. *I did not stand up either to cast or to land my fish.* I learnt much from my first dace-fishing. Let the beginner absorb this law of *keeping out of sight*, for it will apply to all fishing.

Dace spawn in the spring, afterwards spending considerable time in the swift gravelly shallows to clean themselves. Later they disperse and may be found in all manner of swims. In winter they are, like most freshwater fish, to be found in the deeper water. The shallows are the first to be warmed by the summer sun, consequently aquatic life appears there soonest. This, apart from priming, is the attraction for fish in the shallows. As winter approaches, the shallows quickly



cool and aquatic life dies or is eaten, so the fish gradually retire to the still comparatively warm depths.

Dace will take most roach baits, but red worms, gentles, or caddis are perhaps the most readily taken. Hemp, especially in the Thames and Lee, is a most killing bait.

### Bronze Bream

Of the breams there are three kinds found in British waters, bronze bream, silver bream, and Pomeranian

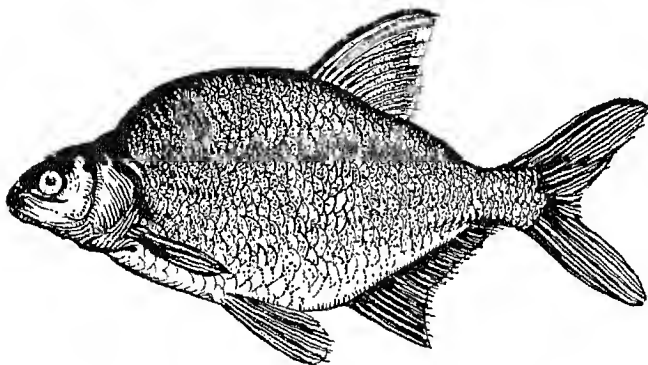


FIG. 12. BRONZE BREAM (*Abramis brama*)

The Record is 13 lb. 9 oz. from Chiddingstone Lake in October, 1945  
(Mr. E. G. Costin).

bream. The bronze bream (Fig. 12) is the most common, being found, except in Devon and Cornwall, in lakes, rivers, reservoirs, and ponds throughout England and Ireland; it is not found in the North of Scotland or Western Wales.

In general appearance it is clumsy and barge-like when compared with the streamline of roach and dace, so much so, that it is sometimes dubbed Heavy-sides, Alderman, and Blow-bellows. It is extraordinarily deep for its

length, as are all the bream tribe. The bream is a sluggish fish, swimming in shoals and feeding on or near the bottom on aquatic life among the weeds and mud. Yet at times it can put up a good fight when hooked, as the roach-fisher, taken by surprise on his fine tackle, has cause to know. As its name suggests, its colouring is a bronzy-brown, merging into a whitish huc underneath. Bream grow very rapidly and attain a weight of 6 lb., though much heavier fish have been accounted for.

Bream spawn in late spring, and may be fished for from the late summer till about the beginning of October. In the early summer they may be seen near the surface, but then they have little or no interest in the angler's lures. About August they begin to sit up and take notice, so to speak, and then the angler may reasonably expect to catch them. Towards October, they seek the mud in deep water and there they remain, quiescent, throughout the winter months. Occasionally, when the water is coloured, an odd fish or so may be taken even in winter, but these occasions are rare. Yet the vagaries of fishing are such that I caught my largest bream on a January day, with a north-east wind blowing a gale and snow falling. It was the only fish I caught that day. The angler walking round the margin of a lake on a day in early summer may see the reeds swaying without any apparent reason: it is the bream cleaning themselves. They are a slimy fish and the angler is well advised to have a towel to wipe his hands after handling them.

Very early morning and late evening are the best times to catch bream, though in certain localities good bags may be made in the day-time. In the summer-time they can be seen just under the surface of the water in shoals, looking, at a distance, like shadows from the clouds. Then, of course, there is no difficulty in locating them.

They are very fond of patrolling a certain beat—if I may use the phrase—where they remain for weeks at a time. When they have “gone down” they are not so easy to locate, especially in large lakes or reservoirs. The vicinity of reeds is a guide in this respect, and bubbles in mud-clouds are a sure sign of probing bream or tench; if they cannot be located, they must be enticed by ground-baiting. Night fishing is often practised for these fish, especially by the professional bream-fishers of the Ouse. (See the section on night fishing, p. 94.)

Red worms, lobs, or brandlings are undoubtedly the best baits, especially in the Broads district, though I have taken them on both paste and bread-crust. The methods employed in fishing for them are float-fishing and float-ledgering. To take them in any quantity the swim should be ground-baited three or four consecutive days before the fishing, leaving an interval of twenty-four hours or so from the last ground-baiting. In deep swims, a slider-float is used (see Fig. 5) but in shallow water, of say 4 to 6 ft., the Nottingham style is better. As the angler will have to cast at least 25 ft. out—bream are shy feeders—heavier tackle will be used than in roach fishing; the float must carry more shot and is therefore heavier. My own particular favourite is a home-made one, made from a swan's flight feather. It is about a foot long and will carry quite a number of shot. The part that is under the water is painted green to resemble a reed. A No. 6 hook should be used and no shot on the hook-link (shot should never be put on the hook-link). Low paternostering is my favourite method employed in bream-fishing (see Chapter V).

The bream bite is unusual and peculiar. First there is a faintest quiver of the float, then it slowly rises out of the water, turns over, falls flat and finally disappears in a

slanting angle beneath the surface of the water. In a later chapter I shall deal more fully with this, as it is of some importance.

### Silver Bream

Though more local than the bronze bream this fish (Fig. 13) is plentiful where it occurs, chiefly in rivers and lakes of Eastern England. Dark on the back, with its silvery sides merging into white, it is rather a pretty fish, though extremely slimy to handle. It is extraordinarily thin, so much so that it is called Tin-plate or Breamflat.

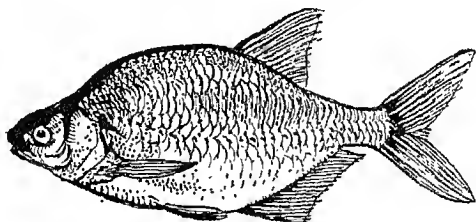


FIG. 13. SILVER BREAM (*Blicca bjoernka*)  
The Record is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  lb. from Tortworth Lake (Glos.), in 1923 (Mr. C. Rhind).

It feeds on the bottom on various forms of aquatic life and is very partial to the angler's lures, such as worms, paste or gentles, to such an extent that it is often a nuisance when the angler is out for better game.

These fish readily respond to ground-baiting. Float-fishing and float-ledgering are methods employed in catching them. The bite is subtle, especially in float-ledgering, and the float is rarely taken under, so the angler should strike at the slightest movement of the float. These fish attain no great size, the average captures being from 6 in. to 8 in.; a 1 lb. fish is a good capture, a 2 lb. fish being a rarity.

### **Pomeranian Bream**

This fish is extremely local. It is not yet decided whether it is a hybrid, roach-bream, or a distinct species. It is very similar to the silver bream, but differs in being broader across the back, and shallower in the body. In habits it is much the same as the silver bream and the same methods and baits will bring about its capture.

### **Carp**

The carp is something of an aristocrat among freshwater fish. Possessing, as it does, greater brain capacity,



FIG 14. THE CARP POND

it is a wise old fish and not very easily caught. Yet, strange to say, it is easily tamed. I have kept carp in aquaria and in my garden pond and in a very short time

they have been tame enough to take a worm from my fingers. They lead a sluggish existence in ponds, lakes, and slow-moving rivers throughout England, Wales, and Ireland. Their natural food is composed of vegetable matter and small aquatic life, though they will accept a variety of baits, including worms, honey-paste, bread-crusts, gentles, etc.

There are five varieties of carp, namely, the common carp, crucian carp, mirror carp, golden carp, and leather carp. As with the exception of the common carp the varieties are more or less rare and are not likely to be met with, at any rate in the beginner's first season, and as in any case their habits are similar to those of the common carp, I will be content merely to mention their physical differences.

*Crucian Carp.* Generally smaller than the common carp and possesses no barbels.

*Mirror Carp.* Easily distinguished by its large mirror-like gleaming scales. A handsome fish, but very local.

*Leather Carp.* Remarkable for its smooth leather-like skin and absence of scales.

*Golden Carp.* Closely related to the common goldfish, except that it has four barbels, whereas the goldfish has none. With its golden colour it is a handsome fish. Rarely met with in the wild state.

## **The Common Carp**

In colour the common carp (Fig. 15) is of a golden brown, shading to a yellow-white towards the belly. Its scales are large, the fins dark brown, and the one long fin on the back is its distinguishing feature. A barb hangs from each side of the mouth. The fish are long-lived and attain a great size, especially on the Continent where the weight of 40 lb. has been recorded; 15 lb. is a good fish

for this country, though specimens of 20 lb. and over have been taken.

They are more frequently met with in ponds and lakes than in rivers. A reed-lined pond where water-lilies almost cover the surface of the water is a typical carp-pond. In such a pond I have seen them swimming in shoals just beneath the surface of the water and have, at times, without seeing the fish, seen the water-lily leaves heave with their presence; this has been during the summer months, for they are rarely seen or captured during the winter-time. Carp spawn from May till June.

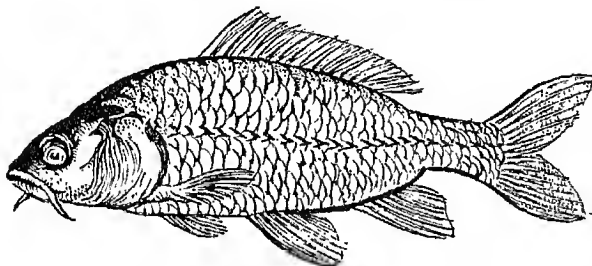


FIG. 15. COMMON CARP (*Cyprinus carpio*)  
The Record is 26lb. from Mapperley in 1930 (Mr. Albert Buckley).

Apart from the baits mentioned above, parboiled potatoes, bread-paste, green peas, cherries, and almost any kind of grub are acceptable. Carp are very cautious feeders and consequently the angler must fish "far off" for them. Low paternostering is an ideal method; with this method (described in Chapter V) the bait is cast as much as 30 to 40 yards out. The use of the word "low" affixed to paternoster is my own way of differentiating this from the upright paternoster. With this method the angler fishes from the bank. On the lead of the trace a knob of ground-bait, especially prepared so as to stick, is squeezed; this gets over the difficulty of ground-baiting

in a distant swim. In float-fishing in deep water a slider-float should be used. Any shot should be placed at least 18 in. above the hook, and all the gut that will be on the bottom should be stained brown. When possible, fish near in, in the vicinity of lily-beds. An effective method, if one can so cast, is to aim for a lily-patch so that the shot falls on the floating leaves with the bait hanging over in the water; it is quite possible when the lilies grow "near in." Another method when fishing a river if the current is not too swift, is to hook a largish piece of bread and allow it to float down the stream, no float being used; the line for at least 6 ft. from the bait being stained green and well greased.

### Tench

In habits the tench (Fig. 16) is very much like the bream, inhabiting still, mud-bottomed lakes and ponds.

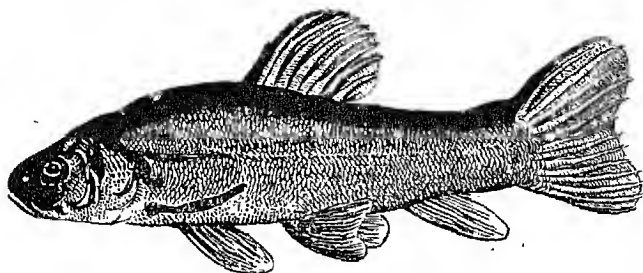


FIG. 16. TENCH (*Tinca tinca*)

The Record is two fish: 7 lb. from Pottery Pits, Weston-super-Mare, in 1882 (Mr. Stacey), and 7 lb. from a mere near Thetford in 1933 (Rev. E. E. Alston).

The two fish are often found together, though greatly differing in form. The tench is a handsome fish with an all-over colour of golden olive-green. The fins are of an inky-black hue, the eyes small and ruby-red, the scales very small and covered in slime, making it an extremely



slippery fish to handle. Tenacious of life, it will live an extraordinarily long time out of water. I have, on more than one occasion, brought a tench home in my pack, over a two hours' journey, to put into my garden pond, where it has lived for years. In winter these fish go into what might be termed semi-hibernation. Once, in repotting a water-plant from my pond, I found a hibernating tench at the bottom of the pot among the roots of the plant.

A strongly built though sluggish fish, it will put up a tremendous fight when hooked, and will bore, making for the mud or weeds. The angler must keep his line taut so as to give the fish no opportunity for using its powerful tail. Even when you have succeeded in netting this fish it is so slippery that unless you take it well away from the water's edge it will slip from your hands and regain its freedom.

A 4 lb. tench is a good fish, though specimens up to 6 lb. are not infrequently taken. The Hampshire Avon and the Upper Thames are noted for their large tench. The tench is, more or less, a late spring and summer fish, taken in the early morning when the dew is yet wet upon the grass, or in the late evening when the ground mist creeps over the landscape. The time *par excellence* for catching tench is on a still, warm, muggy summer's evening, when the moths are just beginning to hover over the sedges. In winter-time the fish are rarely up and about, but a still, warm day will often tempt them forth. Fish for them near the bank or near the edge of weed-patches, near water-lilies, and in rivers just where the sedges meet the water.

Float-ledgering is by far the best method of capturing them, using lob worms or red worms, paste, or maggots as bait, with a preference for worms. The swim should

be well ground-baited, a little of whatever bait is used being included in the ground-bait.

There is a variety, of German origin, called the golden tench. In this country its principal habitat is in aquaria, though it occurs, very locally, in some English ponds and lakes. It differs from its more sober-coloured brethren only in its colour.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FISH (*continued*)

#### **Perch (Including Pope or Ruffe)**

The perch (Fig. 17), though not so streamlined as the preceding fish, is perhaps the most strikingly handsome of all freshwater fishes. It is, in every respect, of heavier build than either the roach, rudd, chub, or dace. Its

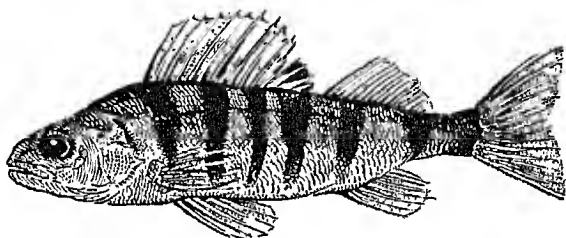


FIG. 17. PERCH (*Perca fluviatilis*)

The Record is 5 lb. 4½ oz. from Stradsett Lake, Norfolk, in 1936 (Mr. H. Green).

humped back is one of its conspicuous features. In coloration, its back is dark olive, its sides a golden-greenish brown, merging into whitish towards the belly. The fins and tail are red and the scales small and tough. The rays of the dorsal fins are sharp-pointed, and this fact is often forcibly brought home to the angler when handling the fish carelessly. These rays, when erected, form some protection against the greedy propensities of such pirates as the pike. When small perch are used as bait, some anglers cut off the spines, but this is a ghastly practice and quite unnecessary. From the back and a little over half-way down the sides are six dark bars of colour, which, together with the greenish-brown sides, form a

protective coloration among the weeds in which it is so often found. A fish of 1 lb. in weight is a good fish, but specimens of 2 lb. or even 3, 4, or 5 lb. are occasionally met with.

Perch spawn is laid in the late spring; it hangs in the water in gelatinous bands, clinging to the weeds and rushes, and is greatly sought after by wild fowl and swans.

The perch is widely distributed and is found in nearly all lakes, ponds, and rivers in the British Isles. Their principal haunts are the vicinity of weeds, especially in summer, quiet corners of weirs, culverts of reservoirs, mill-streams, and the neighbourhood of camp shedding where the timbers come down to the river; and under steep clay banks, by the sides of willows and alders where the roots grow out into the water. Towards autumn's end the fish seek deep water where they form into shoals, fish about the same size keeping together, for it is not in the nature of things that perch, living in deep holes as they do and being of a predatory nature, could dwell big and little fish together in unity for long. A friend of mine had one of his biggest takes of perch by using small perch as bait.

These fish are bold biters and are among the first victims of the small boy's worms and willow wand. I have, in the Lake district, and in Lincolnshire dykes and Irish lakes, taken as many as two hundred at a fishing, and have always found that the nearer the bottom the larger the fish. But it is not to be thought that the big fellows—the only ones worth while—are so easy of capture. Most styles of fishing will take a perch, float-fishing, ledgering, paternostering, or tight-lining. Perhaps the method most practised is paternostering (Chapter V).

In order of merit, the baits mostly used are minnows, gudgeon, lobworms, and small perch, for the larger fish;

minnows, when procurable, are far and away the most killing bait. The colour of the water and the conditions of the day play their part in determining which bait to use. In the Lincolnshire dykes, when the water has been clouded after rain, I have taken perch in hundreds on worm; this bait, unless it be a large lob, generally accounts for the smaller fish. Under the low bridges that cross the dykes, over which is the pathway from the road to the farmsteads, I have caught many an isolated fish. Often, when fishing on a lake I have found a shoal of perch gathered under the punt, this especially on a hot day. The larger fish do not seem to be so gregarious as the smaller ones.

The day can never be too hot for perch-fishing. On hot days the small fry are up and about and the perch seize their opportunity. When roach-fishing my swim has often been disturbed by an inrush of small fry, pursued by the relentless perch. Once, anticipating this rush, I quickly thrust my landing-net towards it and, by a quick withdrawal, succeeded in capturing about a score of small fry, which fell through the meshes of the net on to the shingle and, to my surprise, I found I had captured the pursuing fish, a perch of about 1 lb. Putting the small fry into a tin of water, I used them as bait and succeeded in netting some very good fish. When the perch are in pursuit of small fry, obviously, small fry must be used as bait. As a rule, one does not ground-bait for perch, as the angler generally goes a-roving in quest of them. But ground-bait attracts the small fry, which, in turn attracts the perch.

The pope or ruffe being very similar to the perch, I include it in this section. It is not so widely distributed as the perch and is of a more mud-loving disposition. It is often mistaken for a perch, but its colouring is more drab

and it has two dorsal fins joined into one. A  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. fish is a rarity. It inhabits canals, lakes, and slow-flowing rivers, keeping to deep water, where it lives on the bottom. It feeds on small fry of other fish, shell-fish and aquatic larvæ, and readily takes the red worm intended for better game. It is seldom fished for, usually being taken when in quest for other fish.

### Pike

The pike (Fig. 18) is the most voracious of all freshwater fishes. It grows to a great size and has an insatiable

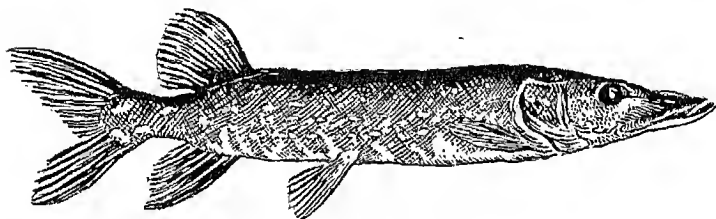


FIG. 18. PIKE (*Esox lucius*)

The Record is 37 lb. 8 oz., caught by Mr. C. Warwick at Fordingbridge, R. Avon, in October, 1944; displacing the two 37-lb. fish caught by Mr. Alfred Jardine in 1879 and Major W. H. Booth in 1910.

appetite. Because of its ferocity and greed, there is no fish that has had so much, either fiction or fact, written about it. At times it will take anything from a piece of red wool to the boat-house key, anything that swims on or in the water; though this does not mean that it is always on the feed, for there are days at a time when nothing seems to tempt it. But the lucky angler who finds the fish "on the feed" will indeed find good sport. I have taken four in twenty minutes and twenty-five in one afternoon in a lesser-known Lake District water. I have seen thirty taken on a day's fishing. It is perhaps as well that the fish have their fasting days, otherwise they

would be well on the way to extinction. As an example of their greed, I once caught a 3 lb. pike on a piece of red wool, and on extracting the hooks I found a full-grown water-vole in its throat.

The pike's appearance speaks for its savage nature; its ugly jaws fairly bristle with sharp-pointed teeth—these the angler is well advised to avoid—which, slanting towards its throat, tell of the tenacity with which it holds its prey. Its coloration is well adapted to its life among the weeds, the dark-green back gradually merging into whitish on the belly, and, when immature, the yellow markings down the sides so well harmonizing with the reeds as to render it well-nigh invisible. Later, it assumes a more mottled appearance. Its elongated body, powerful tail and large anal fin, sharp-pointed snout, tell of the speed with which it pursues its unfortunate prey. Its cold eyes, too, bespeak its evil nature. Widely distributed it occurs all over England, Scotland, and Wales.

Pike spawn in the early year, seeking the quiet backwaters and ditches where the spawn is deposited amongst the weeds. After spawning, they return to their habitual haunts. They are solitary fish, though, on one occasion, I counted no less than twenty-one fish in a stretch of narrow water over a distance of about 30 yd. This, I take it, was more because of the nature of the environment than for any social inclination. It was the time of the "close season." At that time the fish are in very poor condition, being flabby, lean and hungry. It is well on to October's end before they reach real physical perfection.

A week before I wrote this, I fished one day when the north-west wind blew a gale. Other fish would not look at a bait and about four o'clock I decided to pike-fish. From a sheltered backwater, I managed to catch two or three small roach for bait and started pike-fishing. This

was the occasion on which I engaged four fish in about twenty minutes. A windy day is invariably a good day, for the angler, owing to the rough water, is rendered less conspicuous to the sharp eyes of the fish, and the water seemingly is more aerated, whetting the pike's appetite.

To digress a moment, I have always found a strong upstream wind unfavourable to general fishing. This, I think, causes excessive aeration. On the other hand, in normally still waters of lakes and ponds when the westerly wind has been blowing great guns and marline-spikes, the increased aeration of the water causes the fish to feed. A conclusive argument is the fact that, finding it too cold in the teeth of the wind, I have sought a more sheltered spot and found sport nil; so I have gone back again into the blustering wind, where I continued to catch fish.

Winter-time is, undoubtedly, the best time for pike-fishing. Days of frost are good days, especially in river-fishing; days when the reeds are white and the water's edge bears a thin coating of ice. If perchance the sun breaks through the morning mist, then the fishing is enhanced for both the angler's comfort and the sport. Of course the angler must be suitably dressed for such days; with a woollen pullover, comforter, and rubber boots with two pairs of socks, he will not be cold. He should also carry a flask of hot tea or cocoa, which will be found most comforting.

There are several methods by which the capture of pike is brought about. The following are the ones generally used: live-baiting with float tackle, live-baiting with paternoster tackle, and spinning with dead bait or artificial bait. In my experience, live-baiting—perhaps not the most sporting method—is the most killing and invariably gets the bigger fish; roach, rudd, dace, gudgeon, sometimes goldfish, are the baits generally used, with roach



perhaps the favourite. Yet one cannot be dogmatic on this point. In waters where the fish have acquired a taste for gudgeon, other fish are not so killing, and so on. To a great extent, it depends upon which bait is most easily obtained by the local anglers.

Days after rain, when the water is slightly coloured, are good days for pike-fishing. Towards the end of the season, which is 15th March, pike begin to congregate near the mouths of ditches, dykes, and backwaters for spawning activities. In the summer months they are to be found in or near the weeds, especially in places where the reeds line the river bank. In winter, when the weeds have gone, the fish seek deeper water. Methods of catching pike will be explained in a later chapter.

### **Sticklebacks, Stone Loach, and Miller's Thumb**

Fishing for sticklebacks is the kindergarten of anglers. The other two fish being unworthy of the angler's art, I will dismiss them by merely stating that they occur in British waters.

### **Bleak**

Bleak, too, are of very little importance, except when wanted for live-bait. They are pretty little silvery fish

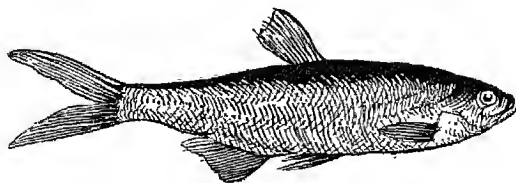


FIG. 19. BLEAK (*Alburnus lucidus*)

(Fig. 19) of about 4 to 5 in. in length, feeding on or near the surface of the streams. Bleak are gregarious, swimming

in shoals near the surface, during the summer months; they are rarely seen in winter. Widely distributed, they inhabit most English rivers where coarse fish are found. They are very common in the Thames, often proving a nuisance to the angler who is out for bigger fish. A few bread-crumbs on the water will be carried away by the stream and will induce the bleak to follow, thereby freeing the swim of their presence. To catch these little fish, the finest gut and the smallest hooks must be used, with the bait, a single maggot or small knob of paste or bread-crust, just beneath the surface of the water.

### Barbel

The barbel (Fig. 20) is not unlike a very large gudgeon, but it has four barbules whereas the gudgeon has only

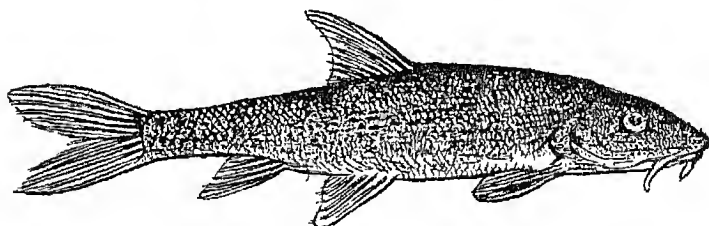


FIG. 20. BARBEL (*Barbus barbus*)

The Record is three fish: 14 lb. 6 oz. from the Avon (Christchurch) in 1937 (Mr. F. W. K. Wallis); 14 lb. 6 oz. from the Avon (Christchurch) in 1934 (Mr. A. D. Tryon); 14 lb. 6 oz. from the Thames in 1888 (Mr. T. Wheeler).

two. Its general colour is brownish-bronze with the head and back greenish-brown, merging into yellowish-green on the sides; the belly and fins have a reddish tinge. This fish favours rivers where the current is fairly strong, such as the Thames, Hampshire Avon, and Trent, though the Trent nowadays is not what it used to be. Weirs, mill-pools, and deep holes in midstream are favourite haunts of these fish. They do not occur either in Scotland

or Ireland, and in England their range does not extend beyond Yorkshire.

Barbel spawn is laid in the spring in the shallows, where the fish remain for a short time to recuperate, later seeking their usual haunts. Their food consists of aquatic larvæ, shell-fish, and worms. They will take a variety of baits, though a well-seoured lob is far and away the best bait. Maggots and cheese are good, and they have succumbed to the all-powerful hemp-seed. August, September, and October are the best months for barbel-fishing, but these fish are erratic and shy feeders, at times going "off" for days together.

Ledgering is the usual method adopted by the Thames fishers for catching them, being the most suited to the environment of the fish, the turbulent water of the weir-pools, where the bottoms are usually uneven. But where the current is not too strong, and the bottom fairly even, float-fishing may be used with advantage, and of the two methods I prefer this. There is no doubt about the barbel's bite: the float vanishes in a flash and the fight is on. This most powerful of freshwater fishes, wonderfully fit through its constant battle with the turbulent water, will put your skill and tackle to the greatest test. The moment it feels the hook it halts, and then the reel screams. The hooked fish must be handled firmly yet with discretion, for a too drastic method will result in a smash, not only of the tackle but of the rod, too. On the other hand, a too-gentle humouring will result in too much line being pulled off, resulting in difficulties which only an expert can handle.

Ground-baiting is of the utmost importance in barbel fishing. It needs thought in placing it and involves some expense, as well as time and labour, in getting it, for so much is needed. As Walton says one can never over-

ground-bait for barbel; hundreds of worms are necessary owing to the nature of a barbel swim. The difficulty is getting the bait where you want it, and allowance for the current must be made. Having selected the swim, the angler should make tests by throwing in a little of the ground-bait at certain distances up stream and following its course downwards, estimating as near as possible where it reaches bottom. By this means the approximate spot where the bait should be thrown in can be found. The worms can be thrown in whole or chopped; if chopped, it is advisable to place them in clay balls, as there is then less likelihood of their being carried away by the stream and of smaller fish feasting upon them. Some anglers place worms in a small net bag a few yards above the chosen swim. This makes the flow of bait more gradual. Similar bait to that on the hook should always be included in the ground-bait. Early and late are the ideal times for barbel-fishing.

This fish is too local to devote much space to it, but attaining the weight of 12 lb. or more its fighting abilities more than make up for its lack of dietetic quality.

## Eels

In nearly every mud-bottomed river, lake, or pond, the eel is almost sure to be found, but, although the most nutritious of all fishes, it is seldom fished for by anglers. In some waters, notably the Lincolnshire dykes and Norfolk Broads, it is almost impossible to fish with worm, except in winter-time, without being pestered with eels—for they are regarded as a pest by many anglers. The chief objection to them is that they invariably swallow the hook—which generally means decapitation, a nasty business, to recover it—or sever the line. Also they tie themselves into knots and make a bird's-nest of the line;

this applies to the small specimens, the larger ones do not do so. To stop this wriggling on landing the fish, place it on a sheet of newspaper, when the fish will at once lie quiet. Whether it is that the porous paper absorbs the moisture and makes it unpleasant to wriggle or whether the lack of moisture renders it impossible for it to do so I am not sure, but the fact is that it stops wriggling.

Mature eels migrate in the autumn to spawn in the sea, where most of them remain. The elvers, young eels, ascend the rivers in the spring. When confined to lakes and ponds, they spawn, like other fish, on the bottom. Once, visiting a Lincolnshire dyke in the early hours of the morning—it was too hot to sleep—I witnessed an eel migration: thousands of eels wriggling their way on the bottom of the dyke towards the sea. They would not look at a bait. They were in such numbers that I hooked many of them with a triangle hook. I was a schoolboy then, so the reader will forgive the unsporting method.

Any method of fishing, so long as there is a worm on a hook, will bring about their capture. Night-time or when evening twilight gathers round, or when the air is charged with thunder or the water is thick after rain, are the times for catching them. Yet I have taken them in day-time too, fish of 2, 3, and 4 lb., the last being my largest capture. Fish up to 6 lb. or more have been recorded.

So far I have been writing of the silver eels. The blunt-nosed, yellow variety is, according to authorities, "a sterile female having lost the migratory habit, and not a distinct species." A large eel will rise to a live bait, but a lively lob on the bottom is hard to beat. A large hook and strong tackle is required. Bobbing, sniggling, stonging, and trapping are employed by professional eel-fishers, but I will not tempt the beginner by describing methods that are not fishing.

## Gudgeon

The gudgeon (Fig. 21) is more often caught than seen, owing to its ground-loving habits and to the fact that its colouring harmonizes so well with its environment. In shape it is very much like a small barbel, but differing inasmuch as it has only two barbs, whereas the barbel has four. In colour, its back and down to the middle line is brown, and a silver sheen covers the lower sides and belly. The gudgeon spawns in May and is very prolific. It is common in ponds, rivers, and brooks in central and southern England, Ireland, and parts of Wales. The Thames and the Lincolnshire dykes—where I have had

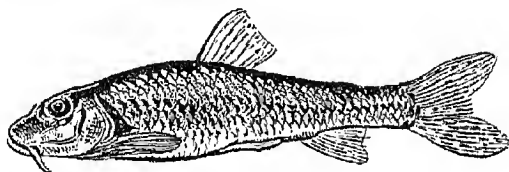


FIG. 21. GUDGEON (*Gobio gobio*)

The Record is 4 oz. 4 dr. from the Thames in 1933 (Mr. George Cedric).

most of my gudgeon fishing—are wonderful waters for these fish, which prefer a sandy or gravelly bottom with a moderate stream.

From about the middle of June till September are the times for gudgeon-fishing, the latter month when the fish may be found in deep water, producing the finest specimens. They rarely exceed 6 or 7 in. in length, but their sporting qualities make up for their lack of size. It can never be too hot or bright for gudgeon. I have often resorted to gudgeon fishing when the weather has been too hot for other fish. To capture a hundred or more at a sitting is no unusual occurrence. At the edge of holes are the very best of swims.

They are rarely taken in the winter, being then in deep water where they remain more or less quiescent. In the early summer months they may be fished for in shallow water, anything from 2 to 4 ft. Ordinary roach tackle will bring about their capture, but hooks and line should be the finest possible. Small red worms are by far the best bait, though gentles and brandlings will take their toll. Though considered excellent eating, they are mostly fished for as live-bait, for with the exception of minnows there is no bait that perch so readily fall for.

When in fishing for gudgeon the biting falls off, raking the bottom with a rake is considered an excellent means of making the fish renew their biting activities. I have never tried this, though I have on occasions probed the bottom with a stick. I find I have quite enough impedimenta without the addition of a rake.

## CHAPTER IV

### GAME FISH AND RARE FISH

IN the first place, game-fishing requires a book in itself, and as this book is essentially about coarse-fishing it is not my purpose to go deeply into the mysteries of flies, as I am neither competent nor anxious to do so. The subject has been voluminously treated elsewhere. For the beginner, it would be meaningless and be skipped. So I will deal with a form of fishing that—providing he is able to get access to the water—may be more acceptable to his, as yet, undeveloped ability. We will fish with worm and maggots for grayling.

#### Grayling

In Walton's *Compleat Angler*, Piscator is made to say about this fish that he is one of the dearest-headed fish in

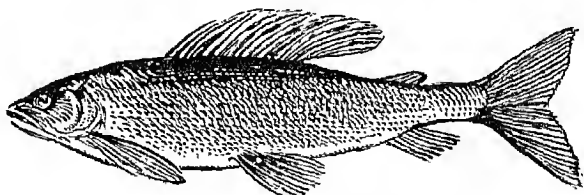


FIG. 22. GRAYLING (*Thymallus thymallus*)

The Record is 4 lb. 9 oz. from the Wylye in 1883 (Dr. T. Sanctuary).

the world, and the bigger he is the more easily taken. The grayling (Fig. 22) is a beautiful fish, inhabiting trout-streams where the water is clear and fast running, with a chalk or gravelly bottom. Though somewhat local, it is widely distributed over England but does not occur in Northern Scotland. The months of September,



October, November and December find the grayling in the pink of condition, and these are the times the fish feed best. Poor old Izaak, in his immortal work is at fault with his natural history when he says, referring to grayling, "He is a fish that lurks close all winter, but is very pleasant and jolly after mid-April and in May and in the hot months"—that is, immediately after spawning. This is one of the few occasions when the ancient authority is at fault.

Grayling will readily take an artificial fly, and are also partial to gentles, worms, and grasshoppers. Trout-fishers say that these fish are detrimental to the trout-stream as they feed upon the ova of the trout, but this is debatable. As a rule, the grayling is found in the deep and more running central portion of the stream, and they feed on the bottom more than does the trout.

One characteristic possessed by the grayling is its ability to rise to the surface more suddenly than the trout, owing to its large swim bladder, dilatable by the easily raised dorsal fin. It has oval, upward-glancing eyes and this characteristic enables the fish to see readily what is on the surface and incidentally to see the angler more easily. So, although this fish allows more liberties on the angler's part than a trout would tolerate, it behoves the angler to keep out of sight in his fishing.

Strictly speaking grayling are not game fish, but inhabiting the same streams as game fish and having similar habits as well as being a most sporting fish, it comes in for its share of attention when the trout season ends. In fishing for grayling the first thing of importance is, don't let the fish see you. The rod should be light, well balanced, and easy to handle, with bridged rings so that the line runs freely without any hitch or drag. The tackle, too, must be fine, with just one shot above the

hook-link which terminates with a No. 9 hook suitable for either worms or maggots. The float should be stoutish, say of celluloid, green- or red-tipped, and should ride steadily upright down stream. In order that it may do this with the minimum of shot on the trace a short piece of fairly thick lead wire should be added to the base of the float by inserting it in the hole through which the line runs. Years ago, when I fished the Yorkshire streams, I used to put whatever shot I used directly under the float, with the single shot above the hook-link. The shotting depends largely on the rate of the stream, and though a necessary evil there must be sufficient of it to carry the bait to the required depth near the bottom. Lead wire, when more lead is required as in a very fast stream, is less conspicuous than a number of shot, especially if the wire is painted green.

Whether worm- or maggot-fishing, a few of the bait used should be thrown downstream in advance of the hook-bait. Fish the water nearest to you first of all and gradually lengthen the range to as much as you can handle and as far as the stream will allow you. Strike at the slightest dip down, especially when using a single gentle; with worm, probably owing to its being a larger bait, the bite is more leisurely, but let the float go well under before striking. The bite varies; sometimes it is just the slightest tug whilst at other times the pull is most vigorous, causing the float to disappear entirely. Strike according to the amount of line you have out. The more line out the harder the strike must be. The strike must be instantaneous. When hooked, as a rule, the fish fight to the bottom but it is by no means a rare thing for them to spring out of the water, especially the larger ones. As in landing other fish, play your capture out of the swim, and keep it under water to avoid splashing.

When you have taken a brace or so fish from the swim and the biting apparently goes off, you may be sure you have been spotted by the keen upward glances from the eyes of the fish. It is time to move on.

Early morning in the months of September and October, particularly after a frosty night, is the ideal time for catching grayling. A drizzling, rainy day is also a good day for these fish.

When freshly taken out of the water, they smell like cucumber and their colouring is very lovely and varied. A 1 lb. fish is a good fish, but much larger specimens have been taken.

## Trout

There are three varieties of trout inhabiting the British waters: the common Brown Trout, the Rainbow Trout, and the Lock Leven Trout.

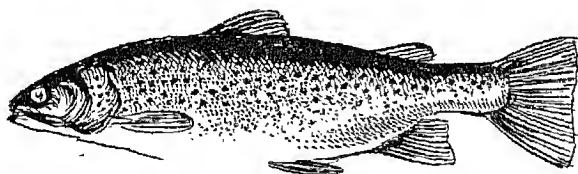


FIG. 23. BROWN TROUT (*Salmo trutta*)

The Record is two fish: 18 lb. from the New River at Harringay in 1907 (Mr. J. Briggs) and 18 lb. from the Test in 1922 (Brig.-Gen. T. Hickman).

The brown trout (Fig. 23) is the commonest of the game fishes, inhabiting pure water of lakes, rivers, and streams throughout the British Isles. It has rare fighting qualities, but the finest tackle is necessary to bring about its capture. It will readily take the artificial fly (wet or dry), minnows, or worm.

The Rainbow Trout is not a native fish, being imported from California. As its name suggests, its colouring is

very beautiful. It is similar in habits to the brown trout, though it takes to bottom feeding more easily than other trout. Apparently thriving in this country, it is found in many rivers and lakes.

The Lock Leven Trout is distinguished from the other trout by the absence of red spots and the less colourful appearance.

## Salmon

Angling for salmon (Fig. 24) is the highbrow form of fishing, if I may so use the phrase, being only for the comparatively few. It is a type of fishing I have never been able to indulge in; frankly, I have never been able to afford it. Fly-fishing and spinning are the methods employed to bring about the capture of this king of freshwater fishes, but to go into details of this multifold art would be impossible in my limited space, even were I competent to do so. So what I have to say about salmon comes from the naturalist rather than from the angler.

Much of the mystery of the salmon has yet to be solved. Even the angler who fishes for them has but an imperfect knowledge of their migratory habits in passing from the river to the sea and from the sea back to the river. The really successful salmon-fisher is one who is born and bred on the river, knows it in all its moods, knows the runs where the fish lie without seeing them, knows the day, the hour, and the condition of the waters which induce them to feed; for there are days and weeks on end when fishing is futile, since salmon only run when there is a spate. There are various phases in the life of a salmon in which they are known to the fishing fraternity by different names: alevins, parr or samlets, smolt, grilse, and kelts.



FIG. 24. SALMON (*Salmo salar*)  
The Record is 64 lb. from the Tay in 1922 (Miss C. W. Ballantyne).

### **Alevins**

The red-tinted eggs, of about the size of a pea, are deposited on a bed of gravel where the stream is fairly fast, and hatch out at the end of the winter. This bed of gravel is known as a "redd." Attached to the body of this newly hatched embryo, called an alevin or fry, is a large yolk-sac upon which the creature feeds for the first two months of its life. During this period the alevin remains on the redd.

### **Parr or Samlets**

For the next two years or so they feed on aquatic life in the fresh water when they attain the length of 5 or 6 in. They are then known as parr and are distinguishable from trout fry by the series of dark spots, "parr marks," along each side of the body.

### **Smolt**

There now comes a colour change, the livery of dark spots disappears and the fish, now a smolt, assumes a very different aspect, the back being dark and the sides silvery. At this time, the fish experiences the migratory instinct with a restlessness and urge to travel downstream to the salt water where their life in the sea commences. This happens about March to July. Those that have survived the pike and diving ducks are now faced with the relentless onslaughts of gulls, gluttony cormorants, and predatory fish. Comparatively few survive, but those that do grow apace on the plentiful supply of food in the sea and in a few short months reach the astonishing weight of 5 or 6 lb.

### **Grilse**

The grilse now return to the river to seek their native haunts and to spawn. This is one of the great mysteries.

What faculty enables them to find their way past the numerous outlets of minor streams and tributaries to the place in which they were born? Waterfalls and weirs have to be passed and here the salmon displays remarkable agility and perseverance in overcoming these obstacles. They are now in the pink of condition, but on leaving the sea they are little inclined to feed and in consequence they rapidly lose weight and their prime condition.

### **Spawning**

With the approach of spawning, November and December, yet another colour change takes place, for their sparkling silvery livery gives place to a dull brownish hue. The male now assumes a pugnacious attitude, some of the teeth become enlarged and the lower jaw and snout elongated, the former hooked upward at the tip. In general appearance the fish becomes more spotted and mottled. The spawning males are known as Red fish, the females as Black fish. The males are now very fierce and assume a protective attitude towards the females.

On reaching the spawning ground the female makes a depression in the gravel with her powerful tail. Here the ova or spawn is deposited, upon which, the attendant male spreads the fertilizing milt. It is now November and for many days the fish concentrate their energies upon laying and protecting the precious spawn, the male remaining on guard and ferociously driving away all enemies and intruders in the vicinity of the redd.

### **Kelts**

After the spawning the parent fish are in very poor condition and large numbers succumb to sickness and starvation. These fish are known as kelts and are easily

recognizable by their general leanness and large heads. Most of these kelts again make their way to the sea, though some remain in the river for a considerable time. Once in the sea the abundant food soon restores them to their prime condition. They spawn but three or four times and rarely live beyond ten years.

### Colour

The colour of the salmon varies according to their environment. In the sea the male assumes a bluish-black back and silver sides, but in fresh water the colour changes to a copper colour, then to a rich red brown. In the breeding season the male is brilliantly coloured with red and brown zig-zag markings. The female in fresh water is of a dusky hue.

This, briefly, is the life of the salmon.

### Rare Fish

The few remaining fish found in British waters are rare, extremely local, and having no angling value will be of little interest to the reader. So, just stating the fact that they do exist in this country and giving the following brief descriptions, I will leave the reader to go deeper into the matter as it pleases him.

*Pollan.* Occurs only in the Irish loughs Neagh and Erne.

*Vendace.* Is found only in Castle Loch and Mill Loch at Lochmaten in Dumfriesshire, also in Lakes Derwent-water and Bassenthwaite. Has no fishing value.

*Flounder.* Occasionally visits brackish rivers near the sea. Lives on the bottom and is occasionally taken with red worm.

*Gwyniad.* Is found only in Bala Lake, North Wales. It has no angling value, not being attracted by bait.

*Burbot.* Is found in a few east-coast rivers. A rapacious



feeder, though seldom fished for, and will take a worm on the bottom.

*Sea Lamprey.* Enters fresh water to spawn. It is a parasite and attaches itself to the body of its host, into which it eventually eats its way.

## CHAPTER V

### METHODS OF FISHING

#### FLOAT-FISHING

FLOAT-FISHING is the simplest and most popular form of coarse-fishing, the method with which we all begin and, as often as not, continue to the end of our fishing days. It certainly catches the fish.

Armed with the rod, reel, and line recommended in the first chapter, the beginner has only the "trace" to consider. How should it be made up? It depends on the nature of the swim, whether in "still" or running water. In *still water* a light float can be used, with lead wire wrapped round the base to make it self-cocking. With no shot below the float, the bait sinks in a very natural manner and is often seized before it reaches the bottom. Needless to say, the trace should be of the finest possible gut.

The hook should be neither too large nor too small. The size is governed by the bait one is using. For instance, in hemp-fishing either a No. 12 or a No. 14 is used, No. 12 for small hemp and No. 14 for the larger variety. The large hemp is much the best. These hooks are also suitable for boiled wheat or pearl barley, or for when a single gentle is used. But for paste, bread-crust, worm, or a bunch of gentles a No. 9 hook, round bend, is the right one.

Now let me prepare for my fishing in the order that things should be done. Having decided where I am going to fish, the first thing to do, even before the rod is unpacked, is to throw in the ground-bait. This being of the cloud variety, it should, of course, be thrown in wet. But be it understood that in throwing in ground-bait we are not feeding the fishes, merely attracting them. The

cloud bait has the advantage that it settles on the bottom of the pond in the form of a film, with little or nothing that is satisfying to the fish; consequently, the more satisfying morsel, in the form of the hook-bait, is readily picked up by the fish, whose eye is generally larger than its belly. To begin with, quite a generous amount of this cloud bait can be thrown in, but later, when fishing, small quantities only should be thrown in, merely to keep the fish interested.

This done to my satisfaction, I put in my rod-rests and place my stool in position. For the time being I am finished with anything to be done near the water's edge. So I step back and assemble my tackle, hoping that by the time I am ready for fishing the fish will have congregated round the ground-bait.

Yet one more important matter must be carried out before I can start fishing, that is to plumb the depth.

### Plumbing the Depth

This must be most carefully done, for on its accuracy depends the day's sport. To do this, the hook is passed through the ring at the apex of the plummet (Fig. 25) and thrust into the cork under the base. Then with the rod held as far over the water as possible the plummet is gently dropped into the water till it finds bottom. With the plummet on the bottom and the line taut, the tip of the float should be about level with the surface of the water.

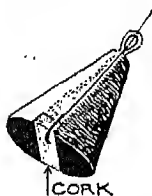


FIG. 25. LEAD PLUMMET ATTACHED TO LINE

Always use a heavy plummet. With the depth correct, my line greased a yard or so above the float, I bait my hook, cast in over the ground-baited spot, place the rod in the rests, and seek my stool to await events.

## Running Water

Here the trace should be shotted differently. If the stream is fairly fast, shot at intervals should occur all down the trace to an inch or two above the hook-link, according to the number required for the somewhat heavier float. The extra shotting enables the bait to sink

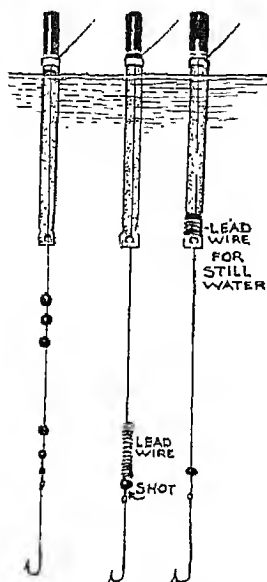


FIG. 26. THREE WAYS OF  
BALANCING THE FLOAT

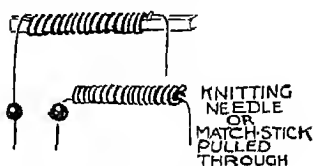


FIG. 27. PLACING LEAD  
WIRE ON LINE

immediately on entering the water, otherwise the end of the swim would be reached before the bait reached bottom. No shot should ever be placed on the hook-link.

Sometimes, in lieu of shot, a lead wire is twisted round the trace, a shot being placed just above the hook-link, so as to prevent the wire from slipping down on to the hook (Figs. 26 and 27). This is, I think, the better method when using hemp as bait, for the fish often mistake the shot for the hemp-seed, the two being very similar, especially to the fish's eyes.

The plumbing, too, is slightly different. The angler should know the depth throughout the length of the swim. It may be deeper at one end or perhaps in the middle. The float should be adjusted so as to conform to the

deepest part, just touching bottom there. Prior to withdrawing the float to recast at the end of the swim, it should be allowed to be carried towards the bank of the stream, and then very slowly withdrawn towards the angler. The apparently escaping bait is often just too tempting for the fish.

### **Hemp-fishing**

When hemp-fishing, the bait is taken at all depths; it may be just below the surface, in mid-water, or 6 in. off the bottom. The angler must find out the best depth by trial, but I have always found that the best fish are caught nearer the bottom, but not on it. Hemp is taken more freely in running water.

### **The Longer Cast**

Perhaps at about 30 ft. or so from the bank is a patch of water-lilies, and to reach this very "fishable" spot a fairly long cast is required. How is the beginner to do it? With light roach tackle it is not quite so simple as it may seem. With a larger and more heavily shot float the weight will carry the line off the reel, from which the cast can be made, but this the light float will not do. So the angler faces the swim with his rod in the right hand, and grasped above the reel with the little finger on the rim of the reel, to act as a check. He then points his rod up and out in a line with the bank, and pulls off some line from the reel, taking the loop thus formed on to a finger of the left hand. The line hanging from the rod-tip to the hook should be from 6 to 8 ft., according to the depth of the swim—at great depths, a glider-float should be used. The angler now moves his right hand backwards, bringing the point of the rod away from the water, then moves it quickly forward, swinging the tackle out in the

direction of the swim—which is the patch of water-lilies. As the tackle comes to the end of the swing and just before it is checked, the line on the finger of the left hand is released and the float flies over the water to the desired spot. With a little practice this technique is soon mastered. This longer cast can also be made from the unwound line on the ground, or by pulling off line and letting it hang in a loop from the first ring to the reel, but on a windy day complications may arise, and then the above method is preferable.

### **Nottingham and Sheffield Styles**

There could not be a greater difference in achieving a common object than in the styles of northern and southern fishing. The northern, Nottingham and Sheffield, styles, which use the short rod and running line, are the last word in delicacy and, I might say, artistry.

In appearance the southern (Thames and Lee) style seems clumsy with its long roach-pole and extremely short cast, but such is not the case, for the greatest finesse is practised by the expert, and the expert in action is a sight worth the seeing. Having lived for years in both northern and southern counties, I have practised both styles but must confess to favouring the roach-pole, especially when in quest of roach from the bank. Its simplicity appeals to me. But as we are dealing with the pole in the next chapter, I will now deal with the northern styles.

There is little or no difference between Nottingham and Sheffield styles, in fact they have merged into one, termed either "Sheffield" or "Nottingham." In the Nottingham style, a light supple rod is used, from 10 to 12 ft. long and weighing but a few ounces. Running line is attached to the smallest and lightest of floats. Obviously this float

needs the minimum of shot on the trace. The line is kept strictly taut and at the slightest touch, the strike is made, the taut line enabling the strike to be carried directly to the hook.

In the Sheffield style the chief difference lies in "leading," which is preferred either in or on the float, causing it to cock to the perpendicular immediately on entering the water and allowing the bait to sink in a natural manner. But this would not answer where there is any current, as in trotting down. Obviously the bait would never reach the bottom. In still water, yes. Or in a moderate stream, where the water is shallow and contains more surface-feeding fish such as rudd and dace. However, the northern anglers know their job, and be sure their tackle and method of fishing is dead right for the water. I have taken my pole "up North" and it has caused amusement (being dubbed "telegraph pole"), curiosity, and admiration, to such an extent that the local anglers have discarded their fishing to watch me fish. I definitely out-fished the locals, but in fairness, I must admit the very rough weather was in my favour.

I am all in favour of their method of ground-baiting, namely, the use of cloud bait instead of the lumps of squashed bread I have seen the Lee fishers use. There is a tendency to over-ground-bait, which generally gluts the fish, leaving them little or no appetite for the hook-bait. The cloud ground-bait attracts without satisfying the fish. The cloud settles as a film on the river bottom, and the fish find interest without satisfaction. The interest keeps them in the swim, especially if a few pieces of more solid and satisfying hook-bait are included in the cloud.

It does not require much imagination to realize that the hook-bait, say bread-crust, falling amongst the heavily ground-baited patch on the river bottom is not

so easily seen or found, as in the cloud film. This, of course, applies to more or less still water.

So don't over-ground-bait.

### Ledgering or "Laying On "

This is still float-fishing, but with a difference. It is a most killing method and the one I invariably use, especially when fishing still water. It undoubtedly gets the bigger fish, for the bait lying on the bottom is where the fish expect to find it, and therefore above suspicion.

It differs from float-fishing proper, in the make-up of the trace and the fact that the bait is anchored on the bottom by heavier lead. The lead may be either twisted wire, pierced bullet or lead piping through which the line will run on being pulled by the fish; consequently, little or no resistance is felt by the fish in taking the bait. A shot is pinched 6 in. above the hook-link so as to keep the lead from slipping down on the hook (Fig. 28). The part of the gut for about a yard above the hook is stained either brown or green, according to the nature of the lake bed: if it is mud or clay, brown; green if silk-weed is present.



FIG. 28. METHOD OF PREVENTING THE LEAD FROM SLIPPING DOWN

In plumbing, the depth should be from the lead, not the hook, to the float-tip; plumb in the usual way, then add the length of the lead to the hook, above the plumbed depth. The added portion will lie on the bottom (see Fig. 29). If the depth is correct, the float should incline towards the angler at an angle of about 45 degrees.

In casting, it is most important that the line from bait to rod-tip should be loosely taut, so that the float registers the slightest contact with the bait. If thrown in loosely



and carelessly the bite is not immediately registered (see Fig. 30). Although I use a roach-pole, which is the perfect rod for this style of fishing, the method can be

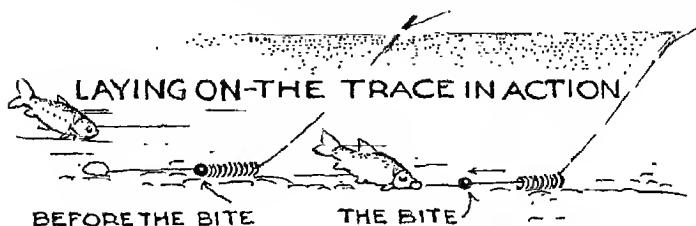


FIG. 29. HOW THE TRACE WORKS

very well carried out with the Nottingham rod. The roach-pole is of sufficient importance to merit a section to itself in the next chapter. By fastening a match-stick

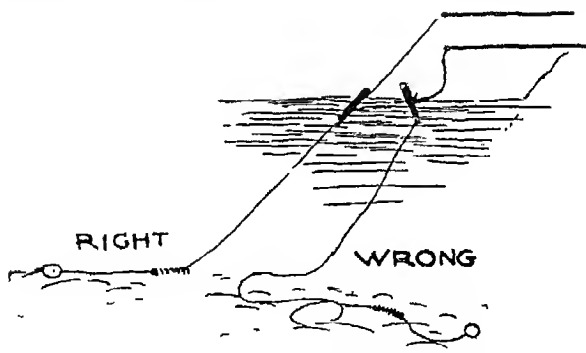


FIG. 30. SHOWING IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING THE LINE TAUT

about 4 ft. above the float and reeling in any slack line between reel and rod-tip, the line is kept taut, which is essential for a quick strike. The match-stick, coming into contact with the top ring prevents any over-reeling and therefore the cast, viz. from rod-tip to float, remains the

same length and reaches the same spot on the pond-bed, which is important when the fish have been attracted by the ground-bait. It is a mistake to ground-bait a spot and then fish a yard or so away from it, so fish over the ground-bait. An effective way of ground-baiting is to squeeze a lump on to the lead bullet or whatever lead one is using. Of course cloud bait would be of no use for this purpose, bait of a greater consistency being required; it should be about the size of a walnut.

On a perfectly calm day, this method of "laying on" can be carried out with but a single shot above the hook-link—sufficient to carry the bait to the bottom and to balance a very light float. This method can also be applied to running water, but the cast should be made downstream and the rod placed in the rests. The bullet remains stationary, but beyond it to the hook there is a certain movement caused by the stream that is very alluring to the fish. The hook should be of a size consistent with the bait one is using. For pearl barley or boiled wheat a No. 12 is preferable, but for gentles, bread-crust, worms, or paste a No. 9.

This method should not be used when there is a thick growth of weeds on the pond or river bed, for the bait falling among the weeds is not seen by the fish; this also applies to a soft mud bed. The lead on the trace should be such that it will not pull the float under when fishing off bottom, yet will be heavy enough to anchor the float when on the bottom; hence the advisability of using a stoutish float. Of the three leads mentioned above the pierced bullet is the least desirable. For one thing, it enters the water with too much splash, and, of course, when fishing off the bottom it would be too obvious and



FIG. 31. PIERCED BULLET LEAD

too large a float would be needed. Yet in swiftly running water it is, perhaps, preferable (see Fig. 31).

On a windy day when the water is choppy an antenna float is advantageous.

### PATERNOSTERING

Whether for pike or perch, the paternoster is a most deadly tackle. When fishing this method, one goes a-roving, either in a punt or along the bank, dropping the paternoster in all likely spots.

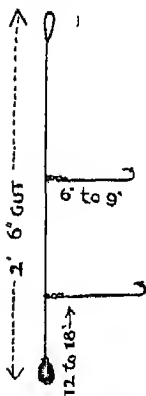


FIG. 32. THE PERCH PATERNOSTER

The illustration (Fig. 32) clearly shows the construction of this tackle. The length of the trace is about 2 ft. 6 in., and it is made of gut. The horizontal lengths are from 6 to 9 in. and terminate in a No. 6 hook if using gudgeon as bait, but with minnows or red worm a No. 9 is better. The distance from lead to hook-link should be from 12 to 18 in., according to the nature of the river bottom; if weedy, this distance may have to be increased, for it is very necessary to keep the bait above the weeds.

With the hook baited, say with a minnow, the paternoster is swung, not cast, pendulum fashion to the required spot. Directly the lead is over the spot, the line which is held in the left hand, is released and the bait and lead falls gently into the water. Any slack line is then reeled in, the rod held steady and the line kept taut.

If the fish are on the spot, they will quickly respond and a slight touch will be felt by the first finger of the right hand—which is in contact with the line. Do not strike, but lower the rod point so that the fish, seizing

the bait, will feel no resistance. There follow two definite jerks—the fish has seized the bait; strike, but not too hard, for perch have tender mouths and the hook is easily torn out. I have seen this paternoster fitted with three hooks with three different baits. This is altogether superfluous, for apart from weed trouble the “harvest festival” aspect is too much, even for the voracity of perch.

Well, having netted your fish, another cast in the same spot may be tried, or as many casts as will take fish, but if there is no response very soon move on, and keep moving on, for it is not good to stay long in any one spot. Perch are of a roving disposition when feeding. Yet the angler, especially in lake fishing, if he is not too much in evidence, may capture the best perch of the whole shoal.

### **Paternostering for Pike**

In using the paternoster for pike, slight differences in the make-up are necessary. First, only one hook-link is necessary and an additional triangle hook should be added. The trace down to the hook-link, and the hook-link, too, should be of fine twisted wire. Below this, the trace is gut, so that in the event of a smash, the weakest portion gives way and only the lead is lost.

Gudgeon, minnow, or roach are good as bait, but the larger the bait, the more time should be given before the strike. I have seen many a fish lost through striking too soon. Do not strike at the first pulls; you will feel when the fish has definitely seized the bait and is on the run. In baiting the hook the single hook should be put through both lips and the triangle fixed low on the side.

Use the same roving tactics as for perch, especially in winter, when there are no weeds to indicate a likely spot. The fish are now in deeper water, and near weirs and eddies are likely spots. As a rule, there is little occasion for

any long casting in using the paternoster, but at times it may be necessary, when, for instance, fishing a large eddy.

In making the cast, it can be done either from the reel or from the unwound line on the ground or punt bottom. The latter is the casier of the two methods. In casting from the reel no force is necessary; the little finger is placed on the rim of the reel and the paternoster swung in the direction you wish it to go, at the same time releasing the reel as the lead goes out. When the lead has gone far enough, pressure is gradually applied to the rim of the reel so that the paternoster falls in the desired spot.

Whichever way you cast, you will need some practice before being able to cast with any degree of accuracy; and accurate casting is half-way to successful fishing. Inaccurate casting can be positively dangerous to a nearby companion. Any available space will do for practising. Mark a spot by a stick in the ground or a stone, and cast at it from a distance of 20 to 30 yds. Use just the lead on the end of the line. This practice begets confidence, which is half the battle. Direction and controlling the reel are the chief difficulties.

### LIVE-BAITING

This is undoubtedly the most killing of pike-fishing methods, because natural food is offered to the fish, and it certainly takes the bigger fish. No particular skill is required for this method of fishing, for rarely, especially in river fishing, is it necessary to cast the bait to any distance. The observant angler, while passing along the river bank, must often have seen, as I have, pike dart from under the bank. Seeking a fresh spot, I have walked with my bait dragging behind me in the water, right under the bank, and have taken the fish.

So it will be seen that pike, during the summer months, are "near in" and lie near the weeds. It is in such places, therefore, that the angler must swing his bait. Many anglers put a pike line out when roaching; then they can afford to wait till the pike comes along, as he invariably does. But, if definitely pike-fishing, one should not stay too long in one spot.

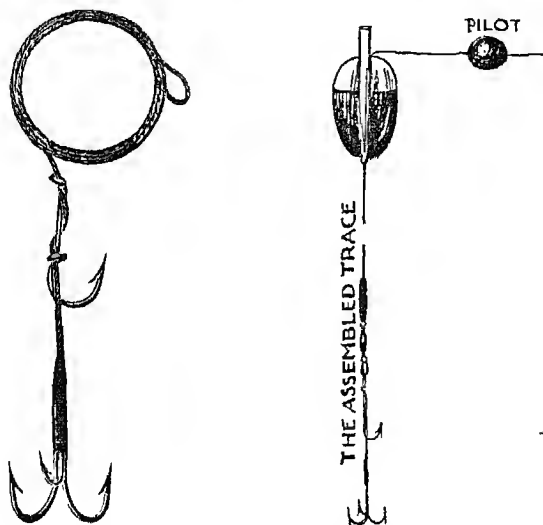


FIG. 33. TACKLE FOR LIVE-BAITING

Let us look at the tackle (Fig. 33). This is the usual float tackle suitable for most waters (though not for a heavy stream, where pike are rarely found). The line should be about 6 ft. of salmon gut or twisted wire, reaching from the hook-link to the main line. At the end of the gut or wire is a tapered lead pierced through the centre or a spiral lead. The line terminates in a swivel to which the hook-link is attached.

## Floats

The "Fishing Gazette" float (Fig. 34) is far and away the best for this style of fishing. Its simplicity is its great asset, for it is easily fixed and detached by a wooden peg, which is in a slit down the side. This float should be of sufficient size to prevent the bait from pulling it under. Above this float is a small pilot float, its purpose being to keep the line from sinking; it also enables the angler

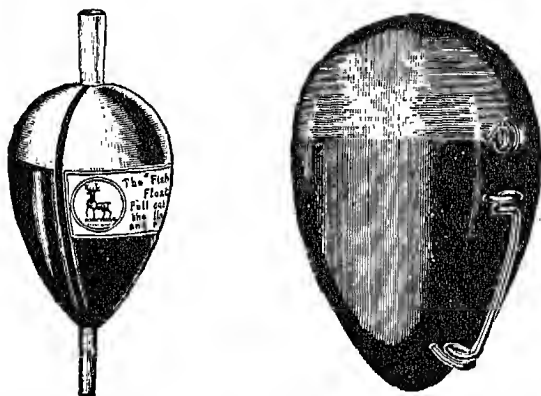


FIG. 34. THE "FISHING GAZETTE" CORK FLOAT AND  
THE RELEASE FLOAT  
(Messrs. Allcock)

to judge with a greater degree of certainty whether a pike has seized the bait or whether it is just the bait struggling in its efforts to escape.

The method of attaching the somewhat similar release float is simply to slip the line into the wire spiral and clip it at the required height.

The bait should hang at about two-thirds down, but may be lower when the water is thick, as under these conditions the pike feed nearer the bottom.

### Baiting the Hook

In using a single hook it should be passed through both lips of the bait. When snap tackle is used the bait should be attached as shown (Fig. 35).

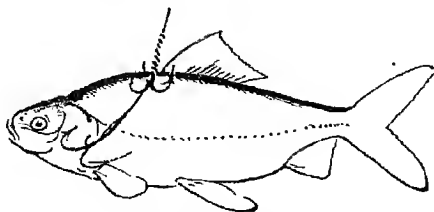


FIG. 35. METHOD OF BAITING SNAP-TACKLE

### The Bite and Strike

Invariably on the approach of a pike the bait gets agitated; do not mistake this for a bite. Then follows a bobbing of the float; the pike is seizing the bait—do not strike. This may occur once or twice before the float is definitely pulled under and away. This is termed “a run.” The fish should be given half a minute or so, according to the size of the bait, before the strike is made. Obviously, a large fish taking a small bait contacts the hooks sooner than a small fish taking a large bait. In striking, give a long steady pull and hold the fish hard till the hooks are well home. Do not strike on a slack line, and reel in any slack as soon as it is realized that the fish has definitely seized the bait. Should the fish prove to be a large one it must be given a certain amount of licence; let it run off line till its first mad rush is spent, then tighten up and reel in, taking care to keep the fish away from weeds. For this method of fishing, I also strongly recommend a single triangle on a short link of gimp, or preferably three or four strands of trout gut lightly laid



together, not twisted; some of the strands will get between the pike's teeth and prevent the severing which occasionally happens with a gut hook-link. One hook of the triangle is passed through the base of the dorsal fin of the bait.

### The Gag, Disgorger, and Priest

These are useful for removing the hook from the pike's mouth, for the fish can and will, if given the oppor-

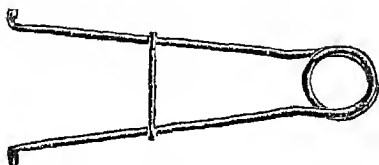


FIG. 36. THE "PINION" SPRING WIRE DISGORGER AND GAG COMBINED  
(Messrs. Allcock)

tunity, inflict a very severe bite. For very large fish, a gag is necessary; it is a stout wire contraption for keeping the fish's mouth open, so as to get at the hooks (Fig. 36). The disgorger is a notched stick or wire for forcing out



FIG. 37. THE "CONWAY" PIKE STUNNER AND DISGORGER  
(Messrs. Allcock)

the hooks (Fig. 37). I have on more than one occasion, broken a twig from a tree and notched it. The average landing-net is not of much use but the triangle-shaped net will take a fish up to 10 lb. The priest is a knobbed stick for killing the fish—it is much more humane than letting it die slowly.

### **Live-bait in Transit**

Live-bait is carried in cans specially made for the purpose. They should never be filled with water to their utmost capacity; half to three-quarters depth is ample. This allows the water to be shaken and splashed in transit, bringing about aeration, without which the fish will die. Never carry too many fish-baits. Three or four bait-sized roach or half a dozen gudgeon are ample for the average bait-can. It is better to arrive at the water-side with few live fish than with many dead ones. A lump of ice in the can will keep the fish brisk and lively.

There is much diversity of opinion as to the relative merits of spinning and live-baiting. Some say that spinning takes more but smaller fish. I would not say more but certainly smaller fish; that has ever been my experience. As most writers on the subject quote from experience, and as waters differ, there is bound to be a diversity of opinion.

After all, do numbers matter so much?

### **The Longer Cast**

There may be occasions, such as in wide rivers or large reservoirs, when a longer cast is necessary. The method of casting is as explained under "Paternostering" (p. 64). The bait should never be brought to a sudden stop in its flight, lest it be jerked off the hooks. This sometimes happens when fishing a narrow river. The angler, putting too much force behind the cast, finds the bait likely to fall on the opposite bank. To prevent this he brings it up suddenly and off it flies. Never bring the bait in quickly, for by doing so sufficient injury may be caused to kill it. Also remember that the more often the bait is taken out of the water the shorter-lived will it be—and

dead bait catch no fish, except of course when spinning with dead bait, when the appearance of life is given to it by the act of drawing it through the water.

## LOW PATERNOSTERING

Perhaps of all the methods of fishing the low paternoster is the best for catching the big fish. I've caught all my biggest fish by this method. It is most suitable when fishing reservoirs or large lakes, enabling one to get into deep water at some distance from the bank, inaccessible places where the big fish lie. Yet this method—except with the skilled angler who desires fewer but larger fish—is not so popular as it ought to be. To the beginner the chief difficulty seems to be in the casting; but with a little practice it is not difficult.

The faults the beginner makes, and which I myself made many years ago, are as follows—

Lack of confidence in one's ability to cast.

Too much force behind the swing.

Too large a lump of ground-bait on the trace.

First of all, the tackle must be right. The following are the essential points—

The *Rod* should be stiffish and not more than 9 ft. long.

The *Rings* should be bridged and preferably of agate to allow free running.

The *Reel* should be large-barrelled for quick recovery.

The *Line* should be of artificial gut, 40 yd. This, of course, should be soaked before use for an hour or so and kept damp during transit by a strip of wet flannel wrapped round the reel barrel and covering the line. (It is too early, as yet, to say whether nylon is better, in long lengths, than gut; I have heard both good and bad reports.)

The *Trace* (Fig. 38) should be stained brown or green and should be about a yard long and looped for two hooks. At the end of the trace is a pear-shaped lead, on which the ground-bait is squeezed. The first hook above the lead, a No. 9, should be placed 4 in. above, so as to hang, when in an upright position, well below the lead; it can be placed above the lead, but I prefer it as I have described. The second hook is looped about half-way up the trace, the gut link of this hook being shorter than the bottom one so as to avoid wrapping round the trace in casting. At the top of the trace, a swivel of the watch-chain type should be permanently fixed, with another at the end of the line, so that the angler, when removing or attaching his trace, can do it very simply and quickly as in the act of removing the chain from a watch.

So much for the tackle.

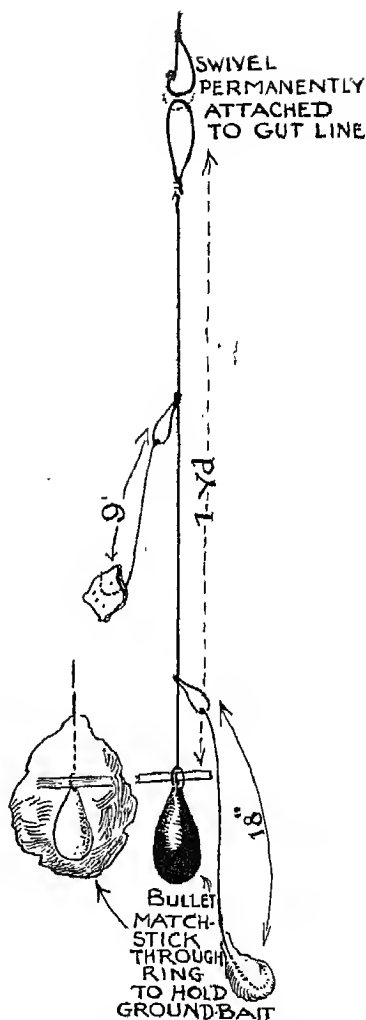


FIG. 38. THE LOW PATER-NOSTER TRACE

## Casting

We now come to the most important part, the casting. This is done from the unwound line on the ground. Before unwinding the line, great care should be taken to see that there are no twigs, pieces of grass or leaves on the ground. It is really most surprising what a lot of trouble these little things can cause on being picked up by quickly-running line when casting. To avoid this, some

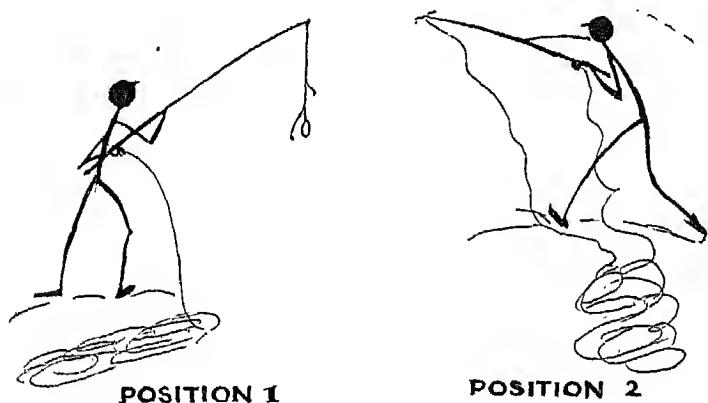


FIG. 39. THE SIDWAYS CAST

anglers spread newspaper or their mackintoshes on the ground—quite a good idea. There are two ways of casting, the overhead cast and the sideways one. I prefer the latter, but this is a personal preference. The sideways cast allows one to cast under trees, but the overhead cast is perhaps the better for direction, so the beginner should practise both.

The ground-bait having been placed on the lead and the hooks baited, the line is unwound on to the (cleared) ground. The angler then takes up his position (Fig. 39)

with his feet firmly and comfortably placed and his mind made up as to just where he wants his bait to fall. Turning his body away from the water and with the rod held high, so as to keep the ground-bait off the ground, he makes one or two preliminary swings. Then he casts, without force, and in doing so his rod forms an arc, ending abruptly when it points to the direction in which he wishes his bait to go. The rod is held in this position till all the unwound line has run through the top ring. All being well, and the bait landed just where it is wanted, 30 or 40 yd. out, the line is allowed to sink, then any slack is reeled in till the line is taut. The rod is then placed in the rests, or on the ground with the tip just overhanging the bank. A small knob of paste is next squeezed on to the line a foot or so below the rod-tip, as a bite indicator. All is now ready for the first bite, which will be indicated by the tightening line, causing the knob of paste to rise. The angler then quickly picks up his rod and strikes with a firm, dragging stroke, but *being very sure that his finger is on the reel so as to strike on a taut line, otherwise he will not drive the hooks home.* The struggling fish will denote the capture.

The strike which follows the bite is where a great many anglers come to grief. I don't think there is anything more exasperating than to wait, perhaps hours, for a bite and when it comes to miss it.

### Bites

There is a psychological moment for striking. Some bites are impossible, some you must not strike at, some don't need the strike, some need the strike of experience. However, they are soon learned. Let us examine them. The impossible ones are those in which the knobs of paste bobs up, one, two, in quick succession and all in a

split second—probably a smallish fish, but the angler should pick up his rod and wait events. The ones you must not strike at are those in which the knob of paste but faintly quivers. The fish is, as yet, just sampling the bait—wait. The bite which does not need the strike is when the knob of paste fairly loops the loop, and the rod is almost pulled off the rests—it sometimes is. This is a big fish and has hooked itself; just start reeling in. The strike of experience is best explained in the diagram (Fig. 40). *A* shows the knob of paste before the bite, *A* to *B* shows the extent of the bite with the line taut.

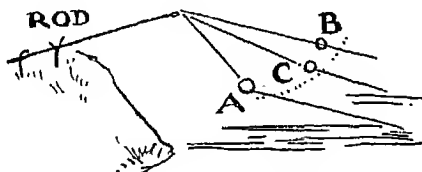


FIG. 40. WHEN TO STRIKE

The strike is made as the paste is travelling upwards, that is, at *C*. This is not nearly so difficult as it seems, as there is nearly always some preliminary warning and the angler has time to grasp his rod. With a little practice it is easily mastered. There is also the bite in which the knob of paste falls and swings towards the bank. The fish has the bait in its mouth and is swimming towards the bank; a gentle strike is all that is needed.

### Further Hints

The bait which is squeezed on to the lead is made up of bran, bread, and middlings, to a consistency that is tacky; if made too loosely, it falls off in casting and a beautiful bird's-nest is the result. To help keep this bait

on the lead it is a good idea to thrust half a match-stick through the ring of the lead (see Fig. 38).

Before casting, the angler should carefully examine the immediate landscape and waterscape. Look for plants and shrubs that might foul the line. Do not cast over weeds, for recovery will be hopeless.



FIG. 41. IN ACTION: LOW PATERNOSTERING FOR BREAM

The rod-rest should not be too high, not more than 1 ft. High rod-rests expose the knob of paste to every breath of the breeze, causing it to swing and be mistaken for a bite. It is preferable to place the rod in rests rather than on the ground; it can then be more easily and quickly grasped and the reel will not pick up grit. When



recasting, do not leave the line for any length of time out of the water, especially in hot weather when it quickly dries and forms springs which will not run through the rod rings.

Of course, no float is used. Some anglers miss this, but on an "on" day that knob of paste can be most entertaining.

I have dealt at some length with this low paternostering, but it is well worth mastering, for with it many of the record fish have been taken. In winter-time, especially in lakes and reservoirs, the fish seek deep water and are more or less quiescent and little inclined to feed, but it seems to make a difference when the bait is brought before their noses, so to speak.

### Soaking the Gut Line

For soaking the gut line prior to low paternostering, some anglers just immerse the reel containing the line in

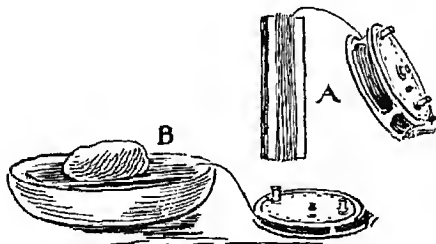


FIG. 42. SOAKING A GUT LINE

a bowl of water for an hour or so. It certainly softens the line but I am sure it does the reel no good. I would not care to treat my reel this way, much preferring the following method.

Procure a piece of wood about 8 in. long by 3 in. wide and of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. in thickness. Wind the line from the

reel on to the wood as shown in Fig. 42. Now procure a bowl of water and in it put the wood containing the line, with a weight on top to keep it immersed, and leave it all night. It is then rewound on to the reel and a narrow strip of wet flannel is wrapped round the barrel, covering the line so as to keep it damp in transit.

It is advisable to keep a reel especially for this type of fishing, with the gut line permanently on it, for 30 to 40 yds. of gut line, especially when dry, is really awkward to handle.

## CHAPTER VI

### METHODS OF FISHING (*continued*)

#### TROTTING

"TROTting down" is practised on rivers where the current flows strongly. It is a most fascinating form of fishing and by its means big catches are often made. My own record is 105 for a day's fishing.

One fishes from a punt, the punt being moored across the stream and anchored by long poles. There is a well in the punt in which to put captured fish and soak the loaves of bread which will ultimately be used as ground-bait. Also, there are two chairs—if one is fishing with a friend—placed side by side and facing downstream. Unless the beginner is competent to manage a punt he should always be accompanied by a boatman, especially on a tidal river; not only will he feel safer, but he will get good advice on the fishing and be taken to the best swims.

#### Tackle and Bait

For this style of fishing much ground-bait is required, at least two or three loaves. When sufficiently soaked in the well of the punt, the soft bread is squeezed into balls, the size of a cricket-ball, with a stone heavy enough to sink them placed in the middle of each, and are then put into a bucket, which should contain sufficient stones for the number of bait balls to be thrown in during the day. It is essential that the ground-bait *when dropped right against the punt should sink immediately*, hence the stone. If the bait does not sink, it will be carried away by

the stream, and the fish will follow it. Ground-bait fairly often, but only when the biting seems to slacken.

The rod should be light, with running line, and about 9 ft. in length; the reader will see the reason for this when I describe the fishing. The float should be stoutish and well shotted all down the trace (Fig. 43), so as to ride steadily downstream. Perhaps the most important of all is the plummet, for when the river is tidal, for example, the lower Thames, the depth is constantly changing, and if your depth is not right you will catch no fish. *This depth should be just touching bottom and should be maintained all the time.* So the plummet must be in constant use; should the biting (assuming that the fish *are* biting) fall off, be sure the depth needs adjusting. Sometimes, owing to lock activities, the current ceases to flow; this also causes the biting to fall off, but these "still water" periods are of short duration and once the current starts again the biting is renewed.

### The Fishing

First of all two or three balls of ground-bait are dropped immediately under the punt. These should sink to the bottom and as they break up, a flow of ground-bait is carried downstream. The angler should then drop his line in *exactly the same place, namely, right up against the punt, so that the hook-bait follows in the wake of the ground-bait. It is most important that the hook-bait should follow in the exact line of the ground-bait.* I repeat this, it is most important;

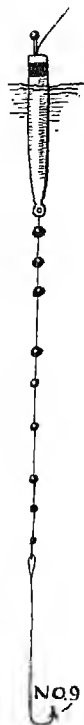


FIG. 43. FLOAT  
AND TRACE FOR  
TROTting

otherwise the angler will have no success. First the rod is held high, with arm above head, so as to drop the line directly below the punt. As the float proceeds downstream, the arm and rod are gradually lowered and line is released from the reel, yet keeping it loosely taut from the float to the rod-tip. The minimum of line should float on the water; it should be greased 4 ft. above the float. The float, on an average, will travel from 20 to 25 ft. downstream, if not checked by a fish. It is then recovered and the procedure starts again; when recovering, do so out of the swim and without splashing. The bite may occur at any distance between the punt and the end of the swim. It is just a dip down. Strike immediately, with merely a tightening of the line, and bring the fish to the net, *out of the swim and under the water*.

Having now absorbed the technique of this fishing, the angler will readily see that a heavy rod would mean very tiring work. Even with a light rod, through continually raising and lowering his arm all day, the angler is pretty well tired at the end of his fishing.

The best baits for this type of fishing are bread-crust and gentles. When the latter are used a few should be put in the ground-bait.

### SPINNING WITH ARTIFICIAL BAIT

Spinning is best done in the winter-time when the weeds have died down. Apart from the fishing, it keeps one warm on the coldest day and is considered the more sporting way of catching pike.

Spinners, spoon-baits, or snap-tackle, as they are called, are legion, and I doubt if there is much to choose between any of them, with regard to their effectiveness (Fig. 44). My own particular preference is for simplicity; the fewer hooks the better, minimizing the chance of being caught

in the weeds and avoiding entanglements at the netting. The triangle, being at the tail end of the spoon, is the

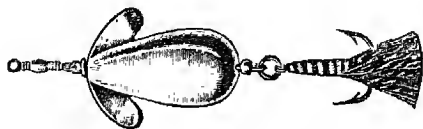


FIG. 44. THE "COLORADO" SPOON

On leaded bar, nickel outside, red inside, red-wool-mounted hook, and swivel.  
(Messrs. Allcock)

first hooked part to come into contact with the fish; this to my way of thinking is sufficient. The red-wool tassel is of some importance. I have caught pike with red wool as the bait. Also, I think, the inside of the spoon painted



FIG. 46. THE "ALLCOCK" REMOVABLE  
SPIRAL SPINNING LEAD

This lead can be used straight or curved.  
(Messrs. Allcock)

FIG. 45. SPINNING  
LEAD

(Messrs. Allcock)

red has its merits; not that the fish admire the pretty colouring, but that red is, owing to the laws of contrast, a colour most readily seen in the generally green water-scape. This colour, no doubt, suggests red fins to a pike.

Apart from the spinner, under certain conditions such

as in a strong stream and in deep and clouded water, it is necessary to add lead to the trace, in order to get down to the depth (Figs. 45, 46). Some spoons are weighted, in which case less lead is required on the trace. The finer one fishes, of course, the better, but the strength of tackle must be governed by the nature of the water. In thick water, the tackle need not be too fine, but in weedy water, it must needs be strong. Clear and shallow streams necessitate fine tackle and little or no lead need be added.

### **The Rod**

This should be in keeping with the tackle. If the tackle is fine and light the rod-tip should be longer and more supple than in using heavier tackle. Heavier tackle requires a stiffer top joint. In striking at a big fish with a stiff rod and light tackle, a smash is almost certain.

### **Casting from the Bank**

Cast across the stream in a downward direction, working under both the near and the far banks. Bring the bait in as slowly *as will keep it spinning*. In bringing the bait upstream, the current helps in the spinning and the rate of progression can be retarded. In hot weather, it is better to spin near the surface, but in cold weather, the water should be spun deep and slowly. Remember the pike does not rush madly at the bait. I have many times seen the fish follow the bait and refuse it at the finish. When this happens, spin over the spot several times before moving on. In most cases the pike succumbs to the lure. By changing the action of the spinner, letting it sink almost to the bottom and pulling it up obliquely, a roving fish may be brought to hook.

The progress of the spinner through the water must be

continuous and steady—this is one of the advantages of trailing (p. 88) and explains why so many fish are caught.

### **The Strike**

When contact with the fish is felt strike at once, and hard if much line is out. I have always favoured the sideways strike, no matter what fish I am after. But for pike, it is definitely better than the upright strike, which tends to drive the hooks at the upper jaw of the fish, which is hard and bony and difficult to pierce.

Pike-fishing is really an art in itself and so in my somewhat limited space I have, of necessity, abbreviated my descriptions, but nevertheless, I hope I have explained it sufficiently clearly to start the beginner on the way to successful fishing, in the pursuit of which more pike-lore will be learned.

### **DAPPING**

There are days in the late summer when the hot sun pours down from a copper sky, and the streams dwindle to the merest trickle, compelling the fish to lie in deeper water. These deeps are often in inaccessible places, where the alders and willows hang over the water, their roots forming an intricate maze beneath it. The banks, too, are a tangled mass of briars and twisted dog-roses. Under these conditions normal fishing becomes impossible. So the versatile angler uses a method known as "dapping."

The essential tackle for this style of fishing is a fairly stiffish rod of about 10 ft. long and a long landing-net, so that the fish may be reached when engaged. The line should be heavy and the cast, as it does not touch the water, stout 1X to 2X, and about 2 ft. in length. This should be well soaked before use, so as to resist any sudden strain such as entanglement or, let us hope, big



fish. A few small shot should be placed in the line to ensure that it hangs straight. The hook is No. 9 or 10, according to the size of the bait. A variety of baits may be used, such as caterpillars, grasshoppers, or blue-bottles from the maggot tin; but whichever of these insects are used they should be impaled on the hook, back uppermost.

In taking a bluebottle from the maggot tin, it frequently happens that a number escape. To avoid this, they should, prior to the fishing, be placed in a narrow-necked bottle so that only one at a time can get out. The insects mentioned are easily obtained at this time of the year.

But first of all, before one can fish, obviously one must find a place to fish from, which is not always easy amidst the tangled growth. It may be even necessary to do a little pruning, for the most likely-looking spots are, often as not, the most inaccessible. This applies especially to chub holes. There must also be sufficient room to fish more or less comfortably, that is to say where there is elbow-room to use the rod and landing-net; but at the same time concealment for the angler is of the utmost necessity. The landing-net should be so placed that it is handy and ready for immediate use; for a struggling fish under the difficult circumstance in which the angler is placed is no easy matter to deal with.

When in quest of trout, a preliminary reconnaissance is recommended to locate a "cruising" fish. These fish patrol a certain stretch of water and may be located as they rise to take any tit-bit from the surface. Having located the fish and noted the limit of its cruising, the angler, from his concealment, thrusts his rod through the bushes, so that his bait dangles about a foot above the water. From his vantage-point he will see the approaching

fish, or it may rise perhaps a few yards below him, disclosing its presence. Then the angler drops his lure lightly upon the water, when, all being well, it will be readily taken by the fish. Keep calm and do not strike till the fish turns and is away with the bait. On feeling the hook it will make for the tree roots. Hectic moments follow, and, handicapped as the angler is among the tangled growth which surrounds him, there will be an exciting contest ere the landing-net is brought into action. Having taken the fish, the angler must now move on, for there has been sufficient unavoidable confusion and disturbance to have scared every fish in the near vicinity.

### SINK-AND-DRAW

When in quest of chub, the same tackle may be used but the trace must be of somewhat finer gut, as it has to sink, and the shot must be heavy enough to run the tackle off the reel, but above the hook-link. Apart from the baits mentioned above, cheese-rind or paste is an excellent bait.

The *modus operandi* is as follows. The angler reels in his line till it reaches the tip of the rod—there is no float. He then thrusts the rod through the bushes and over the spot he is about to fish. Then the line is released and the bait, pulled down by the shot, sinks into the deep hole. Having gone far enough—this is estimated—it is slowly lifted up again and the process repeated, till either the tug of a fish is felt or the angler is convinced there are no fish in the hole.

Should he perchance engage a fish and land it, which will not be without a tussle, he must proceed to another hole, for as a rule not more than one fish will be taken from a chub hole. The angler may try again but should not stop too long.

It is a good plan, prior to fishing, to mark the likely-looking swims so that when moving on the angler can go straight to them, without having to do any searching, during which his presence is apt to be discovered by the ever-suspicious chub.

I have found this method very useful when fishing the difficult stretches of the Sussex Rother.

### SPINNING WITH DEAD BAIT

In using dead bait it may be spun either from a bank or from a boat; the latter being more applicable to a large lake or reservoir.

The rod should be light and springy, but not whippy.

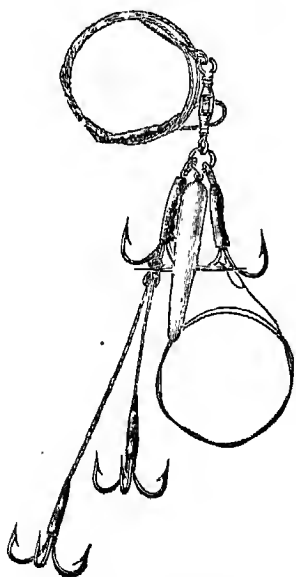


FIG. 47. THE "WOBBLER"  
DEAD BAIT TACKLE  
(Messrs. Allcock)

The reel should carry at least 80 yds. of line, the first 50 yds. being "dressed" if the cast is made from the unwound line or of Nottingham silk if the casting is done from the reel. But the angler should practise casting from the reel, as it becomes tedious to have to unwind the line on to the ground after every cast, and much time is lost. In spinning a water something should be known as to the shallows and the sub-aquatic weeds.

### Wobbler Tackle

This is probably the best tackle (Fig. 47), for to my mind it gives a more natural appearance to the bait, especially

when used with "sink-and-draw" technique. The angler, after casting, reels in for a short distance and then stops. The lead of the flight, being inserted in the dead fish's mouth, causes it to sink head downwards to the bottom. The angler reels in and the bait wobbles up again, and so on till a fresh cast is necessary. Both the needle and lead of the flight should be inserted in the bait so as to be completely covered. This is a very useful tackle to use where live-baiting is prohibited.

### The Spinning Flight

Here again the lead is inserted in the mouth of the bait, and in placing the hooks the body of the fish should, first of all, be given a slight twist, so that on being pulled through the water, it is caused to wobble. To make the bait spin, the tail should be slightly curved. In this flight, I am rather inclined to think, there is a triangle too many. In using this tackle with two hooks, the bait is threaded on a baiting-needle, which is inserted at the vent of the fish and brought out just beyond the eye socket. It is then pulled tight, so that the lip-hook lies in the vent and the triangle hangs free about an inch behind. The bait in travelling through the water does not revolve quickly but wobbles round in spirals. By this method the bait is more securely held (Fig. 48).

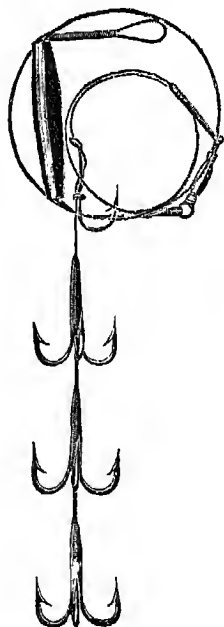


FIG. 48. SPINNING  
TACKLE

With sliding lip-hook and  
leaded trace. Two or three  
treble hooks (size 2 only)  
(Messrs. Allcock)

### The "Kilko" Spinner

The "Kilko" spinner as shown in Fig. 49 is fitted with a simple device to make the bait spin. On placing the bait, the fins of the spinner are opened, and the spike run down the length of the body so as to be completely hidden. The fins are then closed and the head is firmly held. This is an excellent spinner, combining safety in holding the bait and efficiency in making the bait spin.



FIG. 49. THE  
"KILKO" SPINNER

### Trolling or Trailing

I will not devote much space to this method of fishing, as it is rarely practised, at any rate, in the southern counties. In fact, the only place I have seen it done was on Lake Windermere. It certainly does catch fish, but for the life of me I could never see much sport in it.

Two rods are used, jutting out at either side of the boat; dead bait or spinner being used. Sometimes there is a bell fixed at the top of the rod. The so-called angler rows slowly round the margin of the mere, with the bait 20 to 30 yds. in the rear of the boat. With so much ground covered, and so many fish in the water, he is almost certain to catch fish, and he does. I have never practised this method and have no inclination to do so. It is much too mechanical.

During my residence in Windermere this method was known as "trolling." This term is also used in Scotland and Ireland. But according to some authorities, "trolling is the use of a dead fish which does not spin and is worked with a sink-and-draw motion through the water."

Trailing is the term used when the dead bait wobbles in its course through the water.

## THE ROACH-POLE

The roach-pole, as the name implies, is built for catching roach, and, as such, to one who knows how to use it, it can't be beaten. It is the ideal rod for "laying on" and for dropping the float over weed-patches or in gaps in the weed-patches; further, one can cast in a sitting position in the teeth of the wind and place the float in the same spot every time and at a distance of 20 ft. out. Its simplicity scores. Imagine trying to cast with running line in the teeth of a high wind and driving rain. In the first place the line—unless one were using tarpon tackle—would be blown back by the wind and in all probability, being wet by the rain, would refuse to run through the rings. There are none of these troubles in using the pole. This rod was first brought to my notice by an old Lee fisher, who said that once I got used to it, I would use nothing else. He was right. I have about a dozen rods, yet except for special styles of fishing, I seldom use any but my pole. The roach-pole is the favourite of the old Thames and Lee fishers. Alas, these fine old anglers are fast dying out, and the pole does not find great favour with the modern angler.

In length 18 to 20 ft., it certainly looks a formidable weapon and its weight, and incidentally its cost, are against its popularity. A good roach-pole costs about £5. The rod is made up of five joints: the base, two, three, four, and top joint. These joints, with the exception of the top-joint, are hollow, to reduce weight and to contain other joints in transit. The base contains top joint and number three, the top joint being placed in number

three; the second joint contains number four; a metal top fits into the larger joints so as to prevent the other joints from falling out. The whole fits into a two-portioned case.

### **How to Use the Pole**

The method of fishing with a pole is to all intents and purposes "tight-lining."

The length of line from hook to rod-tip should never exceed the length of the rod without the base. This is about the correct length; if too short, it becomes awkward to rebait and unhook the fish. From the rod-tip to float should be about 3 ft. I have even reduced it to 1 ft.—this ensures a quick strike, the whole essence of pole-fishing. The length of cast depends on the depth of the water; deep water means a short cast and vice versa. The cast should be of gut or nylon plus 1 ft. of topping to fasten the line to the rod. This topping—ordinary line—should be looped at the end, with the loop large enough to pass over the base of the top joint. To attach the line, the loop is passed through the top ring (Fig. 50), pulled down and over the end of the joint, and is then pulled up and tightened. To release the line the process is reversed. To simplify matters, when detaching the line, an inch of line with a knot at the end should be attached to the loop. This greatly helps in releasing the line, for the loop becomes very tight during the day's fishing. Any line that floats in the water should be greased and always kept loosely taut from float to rod-tip. It is not always necessary to use the base, for even without it the rod is 14 to 15 ft. long. Whether you use it depends on the nature of the swim.

In fishing, the rod is placed in the rests and the strike is made from the rests, for to lift the rod out of the rests

on the indication of a bite will cause sufficient movement of the float to make the fish change its mind about the bait. In striking, remember that whatever force is put into the strike becomes greatly exaggerated by the time it reaches the end of the long rod. By striking hard, at what may be a large fish, you will most surely be smashed; even if the bite is missed, the hook will fly over your shoulder. So the merest "tightening-up" or a slight side-ways drag is all that is necessary.

Having hooked the fish, the rod, with base on, is quickly flung back under the right arm, the left hand grasping number two or even three joint as it slides backwards. Then the base, or both joints, is quickly taken off, and a short pliable rod is left in the hands. This movement takes but a second of time and with practice becomes automatic. Great care should be taken to prevent any slack line.

Yes, in still waters, in all weathers, weeds or no weeds, the roach-pole with its simplicity is a great rod; *but don't fish under trees with it.*

## The Rests

These should be long so as to go deep into the ground to retain a fast hold. Short rests, especially the iron type, are useless, as the weight of the rod pulls them up—especially with the base on.

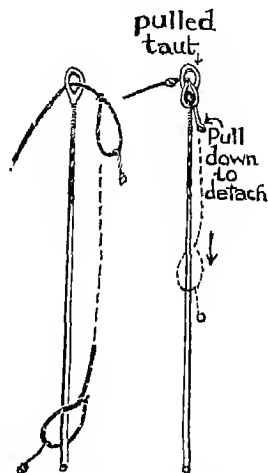


FIG. 50. METHOD OF FASTENING THE LINE TO THE ROACH-POLE



## SURFACE FISHING

This method can be practised either from a punt or from the bank. When river fishing, if the water is not too wide, one can quite easily cast from the bank, following the float at some distance behind, as it drifts downstream. This is perhaps better for roach and dace. But when fishing a large lake a punt is better, as one can cover more ground and reach the inaccessible places that are more likely to be found on a lake than on a river. Sometimes in a lake there is a bed of tall reeds, perhaps spreading out a distance of twenty or so feet from the bank. Here, even if one manages to cast over the reeds, recovery would be practically impossible. On the other hand, in a punt, they could be approached from the other side. At the edge of these reed-belts fish are frequently to be found.

Very often, especially in the summer months, shoals of rudd may be seen breaking surface as they rove about the lake. Then one can follow them up, casting in amongst the shoal, but keeping as *far away from it as one's casting powers will allow*. To attract them to a particular spot throw pieces of bread upon the water, which sooner or later will be discovered by the fish. Having got the fish interested, approach the spot, exercising the greatest caution in doing so. The cast is best made from the unwound line on the punt bottom. There are two ways in which the trace can be used, either short or long. If short, it should be of about 1 ft. long and preferably without any shot. If shot are used they should be placed immediately below the float, which should be on the stout side, so as to aid in casting. Personally, I prefer a long trace, of about 3 ft. below the float, and the float to be self-cocking, owing to the shot inside it. This trace is particularly effective when using bread-crust for bait, as

the bread floats upon the water and well away from the float. When using maggots or paste the bait sinks and a long trace would defeat the object—surface fishing. Of course, these baits will still sink with a short trace, but, as they will be only 1 ft. below surface, it is to all intents and purposes surface fishing.

A method I adopted on a Hertfordshire lake and with which I had considerable success, was to place a small piece of cork a foot above the hook; this kept the bait from sinking too far. The cork was kept in place by a very small shot (Fig. 51). The line, of course, should be well greased above the float, and there should be at least

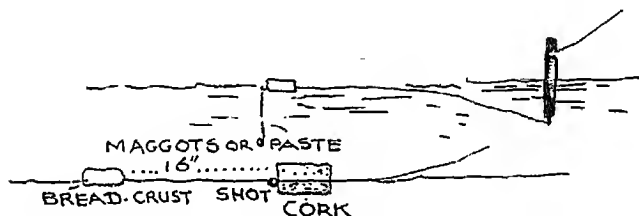


FIG. 51. METHOD OF PREVENTING BAIT FROM SINKING TOO FAR

3 ft. of gut, stained green. This method will often take fish on a hot day when ledgering brings no results; for on these days fish are generally just below the surface. It is very deadly, too, when the fish are rising on a still evening. If the day is inclined to be windy, fish with the wind so as to keep a straight line from the rod-tip to the float. To fish across the wind would cause a belling line, which, on striking, would not at once contact the fish. But a windy day is not ideal for this style of fishing; it is essentially a calm day method.

The bites, as a rule, are very decided, the float disappearing, or, with a longer trace, streaking across the surface of the water. Strike at once! On engaging the

fish, quickly guide it away from the shoal and keep it under water in bringing it to the net. Needless to say, one should fish as fine as possible. If using a single maggot a No. 12 or 14 hook is best, but with paste or bread-crust a No. 9 is preferable. The casting will be the beginner's chief difficulty, for it requires a certain amount of skill to cover the distance and at the same time hit the right spot, but with a little practice this difficulty is soon overcome.

### NIGHT FISHING FOR BREAM

More years have passed than I care to remember since I first experienced a night of bream fishing. It was more in the spirit of adventure than with a night of angling in view that I accompanied two experienced bream-fishers on the Huntingdonshire Ouse. The swim had been previously ground-baited and we fished from a punt using long stout rods—roach-poles if my memory serves me right—with a 3 ft. cast, a large float, and the trace of about 18 in. on the bottom. We baited lob. It was a warm night in August and from the feeble light of a candle-lit lantern we were able to see our float and do the necessary business of rebaiting and unhooking the fish, which were many and large, huge fellows of from 4 to 6 lb. We weighed stones, not pounds, of fish.

There was no finesse in our fishing, the tackle being strong and heavy in keeping with the hefty rods. It certainly would not have been so successful in daylight, but the end justified the means. It was a thrilling night, but nowadays I prefer the arms of Morpheus.

At a more recent outing I ventured, in company with my son, on a night of fishing on the Arun at Pulborough. It was the last night of our fishing holiday, and at the suggestion of my son, we decided on this impromptu

fishing. Having asked our boatman to ground-bait overnight—I very much doubt if he did—we set out at 2 a.m. for a two-mile row up the river to a spot beyond Stopham Bridge, with the mist so dense that we could hardly see each other. It was moonlight in September; sunrise 5 a.m. When we arrived at the swim our boatman left us, and so did the moon. We were in absolute darkness, and if anything the mist increased, *and we had no lantern*. Time two-thirty a.m. and intensely cold. It cost us two boxes of matches to put up our tackle, before we cast into the inky blackness, hoping it was the water. My first fish was a roach at dawn. In due course the sun came out and we thawed. We then rowed down to the mill-stream and there we caught some dace. Then home to breakfast.

I have not done any night fishing since and I don't think I want to. No, impromptu night fishing doesn't pay.

## CHAPTER VII

### FLY-FISHING

#### FISHING FOR TROUT

FLY-FISHING is a multifold art. There is no fishing which requires so much skill and experience as fly-fishing for brown trout. But possessing a natural aptitude, plus a great passion for the art, and with much practice, the beginner will in due course become proficient. It is only by being constantly by the water's side, regardless of wind or weather, that the faculty to appreciate a rise, to know when and how to strike, to determine the right hour, and to appreciate wind and water, is developed.

#### Haunts

Trout prefer clear swift streams with the beds of a pebbly and gravelly nature. They are found in weir-pools, below mill-weirs, under falls, in eddies behind stones, in holes under cascades, in basins where the water eddies slowly, at places where tiny streams or tributaries join the main river, in pools under overhanging trees, and in the environment of old tree-roots which come down into the water.

#### Tackle

This can be the same as described under "Fly-fishing for Coarse Fish," p. 99.

The rod is so important that the beginner is well advised to let some reliable tackle manufacturer select it for him; he will then be sure that rod and reel are rightly balanced and the whole make-up in perfect

harmony. Otherwise his fly-fishing is going to prove very disappointing.

In the early part of the season a wet fly (one that is under water) may be better than a dry fly (one that floats), for the reason that as a rule the fish are at this time of the year in deep water, and look for their food there; for there are then comparatively few flies upon the water. Therefore the angler must get his lure down to them; so don't be afraid of letting the fly sink. With the approach of warmer winds as the season advances, the fish get nearer the surface, and then a dry fly may be used.

In the actual fishing one should always fish downstream. This does not necessarily mean that one should always cast down and below where one is standing, or even in a straight line across. A fly can be cast some distance up the stream yet one can still be fishing downstream. Fish always lie with their heads pointing upstream and it is sometimes erroneously thought that they take the fly as it comes down in this position, and that consequently it is advantageous to fish *upstream*, so that in striking, one strikes against, instead of from, the fish's mouth and so is more likely to hook the fish. But they do not take the fly in that position, but turn in the act of rising and take the fly with their heads pointing downstream. As a naturalist angler, I have, through my field-glasses, often observed this trait. So in fishing downstream one is more likely to strike against than from the fish's mouth.

The cast should be 3X gut, holding two flies, and about 4 ft. in length. In choosing the fly the rule is to "copy the fly on the water," but, as we have already stated, at this time of year there is little or nothing to copy. So we will use the old favourite, the March Brown.

Let the beginner be satisfied with as short a cast as

possible. At a likely spot where a fish is suspected, the cast should always be made slightly above it. Strike firmly as soon as the rise is seen.

### **Worm-fishing**

Brandlings and red worms are the lures. They should be hooked mostly in the middle part so that both ends wriggle and they should cover the No. 9 hook. Dead worms are useless. It is debatable as to whether one, two, or three hooks should be used. Personally, I prefer a single round-bend hook. The cast should be made across stream, drifting down below the angler; when it has gone far enough, it should be brought slowly in before being lifted out, in case of a following fish.

At this early season of the year, owing to the winter rains, the water is generally higher and swifter than during the summer months. The trout are not likely to be in the swift current; for one thing, so soon after spawning they are not in ideal condition to combat it. Should there be cover in the form of a shelving bank or sunken tree-trunk, forcing the current to one side of the river and leaving a more gentle flow on the other side, there the fish are sure to be. These are the places anglers should seek.

### **FLY-FISHING FOR COARSE FISH**

Fly-fishing for roach, dace, chub, and rudd is at times capital sport and the fly, wet or dry, as the occasion demands, is more or less acceptable to all. Fly-fishing, as I have mentioned before, is not likely to interest the beginner, at any rate, in his first season. But, as his prowess increases, so does his ambition. So let us therefore, be it ever so slightly, delve into the mysteries of this fly-fishing.

Red and Black Palmers, Red Tag, Coachman, Zulu, Bluebottle, Wickham, Alder-fly, Sedge-fly, March Brown, Black Gnat, and Marlow Buzz, etc., pretty, fascinating names, but how meaningless to the beginner! An artificial fly is supposed to resemble some natural fly, but, speaking as an entomologist, oh, what wonderful varieties! But if they deceive the fishes, what matter?

To begin with, the beginner's general rod is no use for fly-fishing. A light, hexagonal-split cane of about 10 ft. is an ideal rod. The line should be tapered and of dressed silk, with a length of gut—the collar—tapered down to

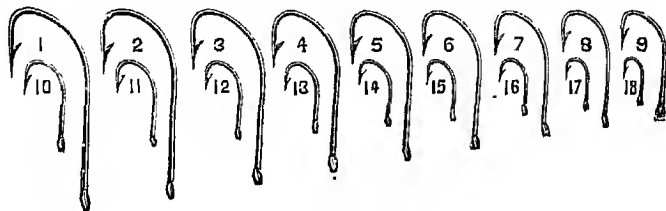


FIG. 52. EYED HOOKS  
(Messrs. Allcock)

the finest drawn gut. Two or three flies may be used, one at the fine end of the collar and one—the dropper—about 2 ft. above, tied to very fine gut about 4 in. long. A third fly, if used, is placed about above the first dropper. The gut, collar and droppers are called “a cast of flies.” But let the beginner be content with a single fly and a short cast.

Hooks may be had tied or untied to the gut, the untied type, known as “eyed hook,” being looped at the top (Fig. 52). The way to attach the hook is best shown in the diagram (Fig. 53).

Before the beginner can do any fly-fishing, he must learn to cast. It is not easy to convey in words what I



might term the fine adjustments, that is, the feel of the rod, poise, and the zest given by the anticipation of success. But I will at least endeavour to give the reader something to work upon. The beginner's chief difficulties will be in dropping the fly lightly upon the water and in making the cast fall straight.

For a comparatively short cast the action is confined to the wrist and forearm, but in a longer cast the whole arm is brought into action. For the time being, however, let the beginner be satisfied with the shorter cast, for as this is mastered and experience gained, the longer cast will evolve naturally. In making the cast the angler

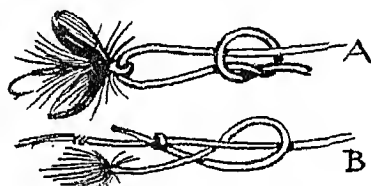


FIG. 53. TYING FLIES

A. Half-hitch attaching fly to cast.

B. Tying a dropper.

All loops have to be drawn tight.

stands with his feet firmly and comfortably placed and the rod held out in front of him at an angle of about 45 degrees. With the left hand he runs off the reel several feet of line. Now with a vigorous backward movement the rod is brought up to the vertical, not beyond the shoulder, which causes the line to fly backwards. A short pause follows to allow the line to stretch out to its full length—this timing is one of the chief difficulties—then the rod is brought sharply back to its original position. Faulty timing will cause the line to crack like a whip with, invariably, the loss of the fly. With the rod brought back to its original position the line flies out over the water, in front of the angler; if sufficient force has been

put into the action, the line should fall straight. "Following through" the angler lowers his rod-tip and the "flight" settles gently upon the water.

For a longer cast extra line is pulled off the reel and held in the left hand; this is released the moment the line has stretched to its full original length. The timing of this release, which is known as "shooting," will come with practice.

This, briefly, is the action of casting.

In fishing, the beginner should cast across or downstream then draw his flies over the water, striking gently, quickly, and firmly when the fish rises at his lures. He will make mistakes, as we all have done, but, after the capture of his first fish, his progress is rapid.

In the summer the fish are often found in shallow water, though it be only a few inches deep, not sufficient to cover the dorsal fins. These are excellent spots, provided the angler is out of sight.

The fish, of course, will take the natural bluebottle, housefly, or any fly of suitable size. I once witnessed a remarkable take of dace on the Lee by an angler using bluebottles from his maggot tin. Using a longish rod, finest of silk lines, about 2 ft. of fine gut and a No. 9 round-bend hook, he stood on the somewhat high bank, with his back to the S.W. wind, allowing his line to be blown by the wind, and by lowering the point of the rod, causing the fly to settle on the water, he took fish at almost every cast. To gain confidence, the beginner would be well advised to adopt this method whenever an opportunity occurs; let the wind do his casting. The fly on the water is a good guide as to the fly to be used in fishing. From his book, the angler should choose the fly most resembling the natural fly. It is difficult to say at all times, with any degree of certainty, which will be

the killing fly. Looking back to my early days, when I indulged in more fly-fishing, on the Yorkshire rivers, Wharfe and Aire, Red Palmers, Wickham, Red Tag, and Black Gnat were among those I most frequently used.

On the Worcestershire Teme, with the May-fly on the water, Red Spinners and Yellow Duns did good execution. There was also a large moth-like, creamy, white fly, in local use; I doubt if it had a name, but it certainly was good locally. For the life of me I can't remember the name. I rather fancy it was the Caddis fly, for the time was early June.

However, the best fly is the one the fish will most readily take at the time of fishing. This the angler must find out while fishing.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SUITABLE SWIMS

#### **Choosing a Swim**

GENERALLY the beginner is so eager to start his fishing that he settles down almost as soon as he reaches the water's edge, regardless of the fact that there may not be a fish anywhere near the spot. He may or may not be lucky in his choice; more often he is not. Without aspiring at being a Sherlock Holmes, one should bear in mind certain indications which point to a likely "swim."

First and foremost, obviously, rising fish. Then the presence of weeds, and particularly gaps in the weed-patches, and places where the sedges line the bank and the water is deep—this particularly for tench. Also, marks where anglers have trodden down the banks through constant fishing at the spot and sticks in the water on which anglers have hung their keep-nets, showing that they had occasion to use them. Fish-scales on the bank tell of captured fish, and spilled bait shows that the spot has been fished, and no doubt, well ground-baited. Even though the previous angler caught no fish, during his absence the fish may have discovered the ground-bait and the newcomer will benefit by this ground-baiting.

Near running water on otherwise still water, such as culverts in reservoirs, are excellent places. Under trees, too, and where tiny streams run into the main river are good spots. Weirs and near locks are first-rate spots.

The swim should be studied. The conditions of the day are an important factor in the choice of a swim. In cold, windy weather, the shallow swims are not much

good, for the larger fish seek deep water, especially in sheltered holes. These spots should be carefully plumbed, partly to get some idea of the river-bed, whether it is of gravel or mud, and partly to form some idea of its contour. The ideal "floor" is one that gradually rises towards the end of the swim, so that when the bait, on its downward course, reaches this spot, it drags and bumps along the bottom; a following fish will invariably take it.

These underwater banks are rare spots, for they collect any food brought down the stream and the fish congregate there. I remember a March fishing, when, theoretically, everything seemed right. Yet I was catching no fish. My ground-bait brought no response, so I decided to replumb the depth for some distance down. At about 20 yd. I found what I suspected, the river bed raised, as much as 2 ft. My ground-bait, gradually drifting with the current, had collected there, at a place where it was natural for the fish to congregate—a natural feeding-ground. I quickly brought my tackle to the spot and immediately began to catch fish; big ones, perch, dace, and tench. How important is the little plummet! The swim was sheltered from the March wind, the "floor" gravel and rising from 8 to 10 ft. I cast in just above the shelving, so that my bait drifted in a natural manner to the spot. This was an ideal swim.

The versatile angler will not adhere too strictly to hard and fast rules. He will use his imagination and from previous experience and his knowledge of the habits of fish, try to realize the best bait and the best means of presenting it. For instance, to put a large knob of paste on the hook in rough water, so that it dangles and dances to the rhythm of the wavelets, would be sheer nonsense. No fish would look at it, for fish are by nature suspicious

creatures. A moving bait is attractive; but it must move naturally, drifting and conforming to the movement of the current.

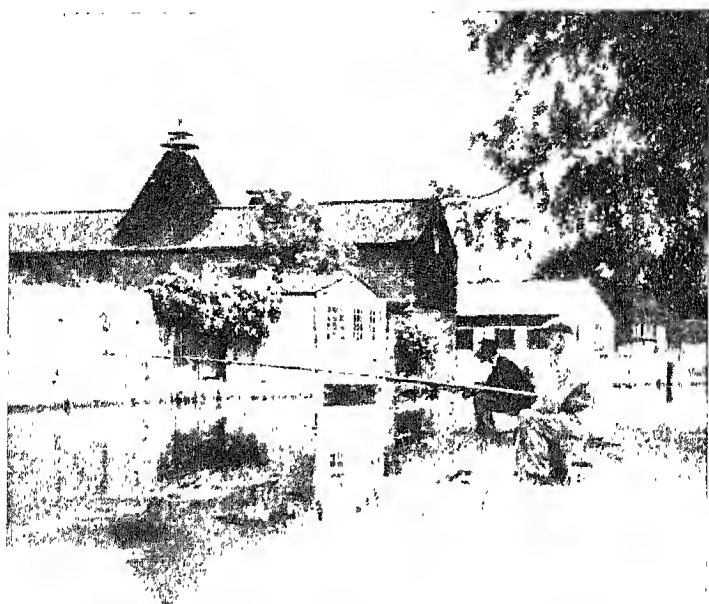


FIG. 54. WALTON'S LEE—THE AUTHOR AND A FRIEND  
AT WARE

Weeds are the natural habitat of aquatic life, upon which fish feed; the weeds also give shade from the hot sun and shelter from pursuing fish, and are, therefore, the places the angler should fish.

These are just simple guides, but, in due course, profiting by his successes and failures, the beginner will develop swim-sense.

The intelligent reader will by now have absorbed some of the rudiments of fishing, and so with this acquired knowledge I will ask him to accompany me on three separate outings, days of actual fishing, taken from "my log" and recorded in detail, exactly as things happened.

### **The River**

To the beginner the "travelling float" is much more attractive than the "still" float, because he likes action. He is impatient as yet, and impatience is a fruitful source of failure.

In still waters the beginner experiences a great urge to lift his line off the water and recast every five minutes or so. It is wrong, of course, for it does not give the fish a chance, and besides, the continual movement is going to scare the fish away. Now the travelling float to a great extent eliminates this desire, for the "swim down" is usually of short duration, the float travelling on an average from 14 to 20 ft. when fishing from a fixed position on the bank, or say from a stool. At the end of each "swim down" our beginner then has the pleasure of lifting his line and recasting. In this case, he is correct; it is the only thing to do. My own favourite method of fishing running water is from a punt, using the method known as "trotting down," so called because the bait, touching bottom, bumps or trots its way down the stream. It is a very killing method, but for the purpose of this chapter, we will leave out the punt and fish from the bank.

All river fishing is much of a muchness, with slight differences due to colour and depth of water, speed of

current and the taking bait. By "taking" bait, I mean the bait most acceptable to the fish. So that we may get down to fishing, let us decide to fish Walton's Lee.

### THREE SWIMS

#### I. THE LEE

On this river there is always current, but the rate at which it travels is varied by the amount of water and by lock activities. The speed of the current to a great extent determines the make-up of the trace. In a swift current the trace should be well shotted (Fig. 26), so that the bait is brought to the "taking" depth as quickly as possible, otherwise a great portion of the swim would be covered ere the bait reached the required depth. The "taking" depth, except when using hemp, is with the bait just touching bottom, and never with any shot on the hook-link. If the bed of the river is of a hard nature, such as gravel, and clear of weed, I like the bait to drag; to bring this about the depth from the hook to float should be slightly in excess of the plumbed depth. In a slow current less shotting is required—shotting is a necessary evil but I like my float to be almost self-cocking.

A short cast and a long rod are preferable to a long cast and a short rod, especially when hemp-fishing. For this fishing my favourite rod is the roach-pole; most hemp-fishers prefer it. With it, there is sometimes only a foot of line between rod-tip and float, so that the strike is instantaneous. The rod, of course, is largely a matter of personal liking, but the principle must be observed, namely, to connect with the fish in the most direct way.

Before we get down to fishing, let us consider the swim. The chief asset of my swim must be its comfort. I cannot concentrate unless I am perfectly comfortable, and concentration is necessary for successful fishing. I detest



sloping banks where my bait-tins, etc., are constantly rolling down into the water. I dislike high banks where one is silhouetted against the sky-line and every movement is a menace to the fish. I like to be level with the water, with perhaps a few reeds in front of me to act as camouflage against the keen eyes of the fish, and I like deepish water. On a summer's day I invariably fish from ten to twelve hours at a swim, so it is well worth while spending time in selecting the swim. To the beginner all this may seem unduly fussy. But even when you begin to get fish, you have the problem of *how to keep them in the swim*, and this can only be done by observing the above precautions, which briefly means avoid all unnecessary movements.

### **The Method of Fishing**

My illustration (Fig. 55) is of a typical Lee swim. Part of it is treated as a diagram and this I would ask you, my reader, to refer to. Assuming the current is flowing from left to right, the swim begins at *B* and ends at *F*. Having plumbed the depth at *B*, *C*, and *D*, my trace depth is adjusted accordingly, that is, touching the deepest portion.

The next thing is ground-baiting. This is different from ground-baiting in a "still" swim. Cloud-bait here is little more than useless, as it would be carried away by the current before it reached the bottom. Therefore, I use a more solid form, a mixture of bread, bran, and middlings, plus a few crushed egg-shells. This I squeeze into the form of a ball, about the size of an orange, placing in the middle a stone, plus a few maggots, or whatever hook-bait I am using. This ball should be of such a consistency that it will gradually break up with the action of the current, causing a constant stream of bait

along the swim. Now one of the balls of ground-bait I throw in at *A*, which is beyond the swim and one at *B*. I note carefully *where I have thrown the bait, the distance out, because my hook-bait must travel exactly along the path of the ground-bait*.

Ground-baiting is my first action after plumbing,

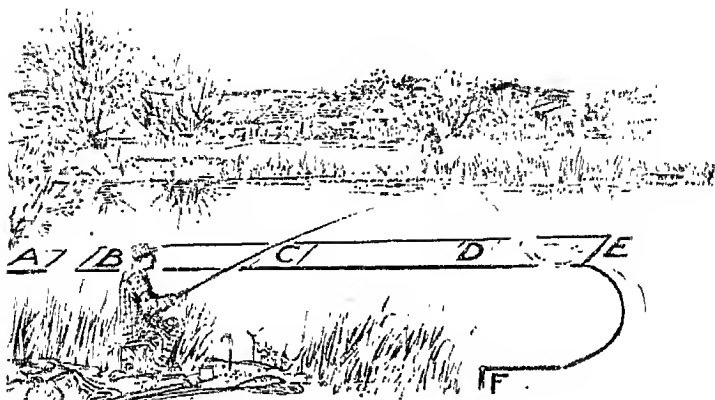


FIG. 55. A TYPICAL LEE SWIM

because by the time I have assembled my tackle I hope the fish will have been attracted by the ground-bait. Before I begin, I have in mind that there is no putting the rod in the rests, for I am hemp-fishing and the strike must be instantaneous. Using my roach-pole, I fish with the base off, otherwise it will be tiring work.

My cast is longer than is usual for pole-fishing by some 5 ft. or so, which enables me to cover the whole swim from *B* to *E*, a distance of about 20 ft. I make my cast so that the float enters the water at *B* and travels straight down the path of the ground-bait. When at *D*, I occasionally check it, causing the bait to precede the float and to

lift. This, as often as not, brings results. If there is no response, I allow the float to continue its journey to *E*, the limit of the swim and my cast. Not being able to proceed farther, the current turns it towards the bank at *F*; here also I take a number of fish. In drawing in the line to recast, I do so very slowly, with a dragging action; the slowly receding bait is a great temptation and I net several fish here. I catch the majority of my fish at points *D*, *E*, *F*.

And so I carry on all day with varying degrees of sport, finishing only when the light fails and with my keep-net full. Now the vagaries of fishing are such that one may catch fish right away, but on the other hand it may be an hour, perhaps two, before the fish respond. They may not have discovered the ground-bait or at the moment may be disinclined to feed. So don't desert the swim, for sooner or later you will get them. Of course, there are blank days, when even the most expert of us fail to catch a fish; days when the east wind prevails or bright, hot summer days, when even the enthusiastic angler falls into the arms of Morpheus.

### **Ledgering in Running Water**

Now a word or two on tight-lining in running water, or laying-on, if you like. The chief thing is to anchor the bait and this is done by means of a leaden bullet, lead piping, or twisted wire (see Figs. 31, 28, and 27). The weight is held in position by a single shot placed about 18 in. above the hook. With the exception of this shot (and the lead bullet) there is no lead on the trace. The fish, on biting, pulls the line through the pierced lead, so that it feels little or no resistance. This is a great asset. The plumbed depth is the distance from the bullet to the float; the hook length (over and above the plumbed

depth) lies on the bottom. No float is needed—the rod-tip will give indication of the bite, the line, of course, being held taut. The strike should be a firm, dragging one: whatever you do, *don't strike hard*. Cast in at *D*—downstream. Big fish are caught by this method.

### Hemp-fishing

Success in hemp-fishing, to a great extent, depends on the strike. This should be instantaneous, almost anticipated. Good eyesight is needed both in putting on the bait and in striking *at the right moment*. Strike as the float is going down, not when it has disappeared. This is not easy, but with practice skill is acquired. A slight compensation is that the bigger fish bite rather more leisurely than the "scrapers" do; the latter's bite is "grab-and-run." The bait should not be on the bottom; it is taken at various depths, sometimes just below the surface, sometimes at half-depth, but I have always found that about 4 to 6 in. off bottom gives the better fish. Don't over-ground-bait; that is the chief abuse of hemp-fishing—by doing so you are only glutting the fish. All that is necessary is a handful at the beginning (allowing for the current) and one or two grains every now and then. Use a fairly light float with but  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. above surface. In rough water an antenna float should be used. Lead wire on the trace is better than shot, for the fish often bite at the shot, it being similar in size to that of hemp-seed.

To be successful in hemp-fishing, one should ever be on the alert. The line should be loosely taut and greased.

## II. THE WEIR-POOL ON A FEBRUARY DAY

In a weir-pool there is not always a great deal of choice in the matter of a swim. Perhaps there are only a half-dozen spots accessible from the bank. On the other hand,

possibly enough ground-bait has been thrown into what swims are available to ensure that fish do habitually frequent them in search of food. So to a certain extent we can eliminate choice of swim and concentrate on the condition in which we find the water.

The weir, illustrated in Fig. 56, is one I have fished

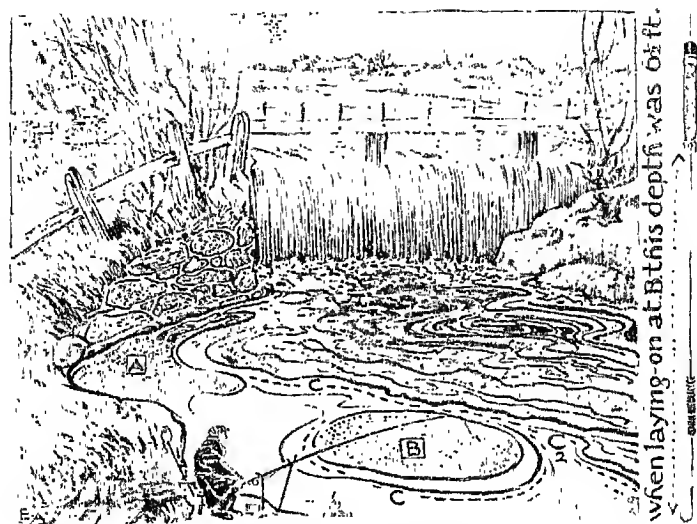


FIG. 56. THE WEIR

In this drawing the foreground is treated diagrammatically, so as to give a clear indication of where the fish were caught.

many times, in all weathers, and I have had good sport, indifferent sport, and—blanks. So I have learned its mood and know instinctively when *not* to fish it. I wouldn't dream of fishing it in an east or north-east wind, especially for roach. The day I am about to describe was in mid-February, a fair day after a week of rain. The river was in spate, much water coming over the weir,

and the water was mud-coloured where it was rough. Now there are always fish in the environment of a weir and the veriest novice will eventually catch one or two, even though they be only embryo perch or small roach. But to catch the big fellows in any numbers requires some knowledge and experience.

On this February day, the elements were in my favour, the wind was right—west—and the day warmish for the winter. On looking at the water I quickly decided that the rough portion was hopeless, but near me, at one spot, it was practically calm and apparently of good depth. It was also much clearer than the turbulent water. So having decided on a comfortable spot from which I could easily work the swim, I withdrew to put up my tackle.

### Preparation

I first of all plumbed the depth over the whole length of the swim and found the shallow portion at *A*, 5 ft., getting deeper in the direction of *B*. I next cast in at the edge of the rough water, off the bottom, to see how my float reacted. It travelled along the dotted line *C*, turned back at *C*<sub>2</sub>, and finally came into the area *B*. *B* seemed particularly promising, 6 ft. in depth and still water, except for a very slight circular movement. I decided to lay-on here, in the hope of getting a good roach or two. Also I felt certain that the area *A*, by the stone wall, would yield perch. So now I threw in a generous supply of ground-bait, including a few maggots at *B*. Next I fixed my keep-net in position. Optimistic! Yes, but then I hate to have to do this when the fish "come on." Bait-tins and landing-net were placed handy, and the line well greased to a couple of yards above the float.

With all preliminaries to my satisfaction, I settled down to fish. The trace I used is shown in Fig. 56, a No. 9

hook, no lead on the hook-link, the trace so leaded as not to be too heavy for mid-water, yet heavy enough for laying-on.

### The Fishing

With the depth adjusted so that the bait, worm, was 6 in. off the bottom, I cast in at *A*. Almost immediately the float bobbed and then very decidedly disappeared. My top joint described a beautiful arc, and after a short, sharp tussle I brought to the net a very fine perch. Recasting, I quickly engaged another similar perch, taking in all about half a dozen perch from this spot. As I really wanted roach, I tried a run down the edge of the rough water, along the dotted line *C*, previously adjusting my depth so that the bait (maggots) trotted along the bottom. I almost immediately engaged a small perch. Rebaiting, I cast in again and for several runs had no response.

My next contact was at *C*<sub>2</sub>, where the float simply flew away. On striking, I felt strong resistance—of a kind not yet experienced—I even gave line as the fish headed downstream. Then, “giving him the butt,” I brought him towards the bank and the struggle was short and sweet. A 3 lb. jack, on maggots! I returned him to the water, some distance lower down, for a pike in the swim is decidedly bad company.

Came lunch-time and so far not a roach. While I lunch I will describe my tackle. My rod, 14 ft., with a split-cane top joint, agate rings, bridged for free running; line 4 lb. breaking strain; float 6 in., celluloid, white cap tipped red, the under-water portion green; “Flick ‘em” reel, large-barrelled for quick recovery; the trace as shown in Fig. 56. Before breaking off for lunch, I re-ground-baited so as to give further encouragement to those big roach I hoped to catch.

Two o'clock, and I resumed my fishing, as February days are short and I must pack at four-thirty. Again adjusting my depth, to "laying-on," baiting maggots, I cast in at *B*, which up to now, I had not fished, put my rod in the rests, lighted my pipe and prepared to wait. Perhaps half an hour passed by. Suddenly, a tremor of the float and then it goes slowly under. The big roach bite! Yes, I bring to the net my first roach, one of  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb. Followed good sport in which I took some very nice roach, some tipping the scale (spring-balance) at the 1 lb. mark.

One loses count of the time when the sport is brisk. The creeping mist warned me that time was passing, and glancing at my watch I found it was already four-thirty. Just one more bait; I put on bread-crust. The float has barely time to cock when down it goes, and I bring to the net my last and best fish, a roach over the 1 lb. mark. Great was the temptation for just one more cast. But no, that would mean hurried packing, and perhaps lost tackle. I counted my fish and returned them to the river; seven perch, one jack, fourteen roach, the largest just over 1 lb. Not bad for a winter day's fishing; nothing wonderful though, for several times I've had from fifty to sixty fish. The day's conditions helped, westerly wind, warmish air, plus the knowledge of where and how to fish. With an easterly wind the odds are that I should have drawn blank, but on the other hand I should probably not have gone out then.

### **The Weir-pool in Summer**

Let us view this same swim under summer conditions. For three weeks there has been little or no rain and the weir-pool has taken on a new aspect. There is very much less water coming over the weir, and it is very clear and scintillates in the bright sunshine. At *A* there is hardly



1 ft. of water, and at *B* it is very little deeper, while beyond *C* in the stream, the stones on the river bed are quite visible. The current is gentle and quite fishable and a gentle breeze blows from the south-west. As I gaze upon the water, I see fish rising in the current beyond *C*; the hot spell has forced them into the more aerated water. Much in the way of fish-food tumbles over the weir.

Well, how does this affect our fishing? Obviously, in the first place, a longer cast is required, anything between 20 and 30 ft. This means a heavier float, with the shotting near the float (see Fig. 26) and no shot on the hook-link, so that the bait is carried in a natural manner by the current. We must fish as fine as possible, for the water is very clear. Personally, I prefer the gut of the trace to be slightly thicker than the hook-link gut, so that in case of a breakage, only the hook-link is lost. Any line that will have to float on the water should be of gut and thoroughly greased. There is about 6 ft. of gut on my trace.

The bait, maggots, gentles, or worm, should be touching, or very near, the bottom, the float being adjusted to a depth slightly beyond that of the water. By controlling the float, the bait will precede it in the water; this means a comparatively tight line all the time. The bites, as a rule, are sudden, so that to engage the fish a quick strike is necessary, which would be impossible with a sunken or bellying line.

There is no hard and fast rule about bait. You find out by experiment what is preferred by the fish. A good take on maggots one day does not necessarily mean that maggots will be the "taking" bait the next day. However, during the early summer days I prefer something alive on my hook.

These are a few hints on how I have caught fish at the

weir on an early summer's day. Weir swims give the element of surprise, perhaps more so than any other swims; that is half the fascination in fishing them. Every kind of fish may be encountered, even an occasional trout. In concluding this chapter I would advise you to carry out the method I have used, but don't forget the personal element, for initiative and the unorthodox often bring results.

### III. THE STILL-WATER SWIM

Still water means ponds, lakes, reservoirs, and canals. They are generally situated amidst great sylvan beauty and it is right pleasant fishing. I have usually fished such waters on recommendation or invitation, and in consequence have known something of the fishing possibilities before I started to fish. This is a great asset, saving much time, for one can get down to the fishing knowing what fish are to be caught and straightway prepare the necessary tackle, etc.

The pond we will fish is shown in the photograph (Fig. 57), a typical carp-and-tench pond, although the time of the year was late for these fish. The rod having been assembled and a plummet placed on the hook, a peregrination is suggested, to find the most likely swims, in the most accessible places, and to test the various depths. On this particular pond there were several swims, but some were unapproachable owing to the mud, others because of overhanging trees and weed-belts intervening. The reasons for the swim chosen were that it was comfortable fishing; that is, there was room to fish without entanglements with overhanging trees, and the depth of water was 4 to 5 ft. with a sandy bottom, and fish were rising in the vicinity. It was a day in October's ending, the wind south-east, gentle but cold,

the time when many still waters "go off." However, fish were caught, as my companion, a Muscovy duck, one evidently acquainted with anglers, could testify.



FIG. 57. THE WRITER AND A FRIEND AT HADLEY WOOD  
(Block by courtesy of "The Angler's News.")

Roach-pole, celluloid float, the trace  $6\frac{1}{2}$  ft. long with  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ft. on the bottom, and a bunch of maggots on a No. 9 hook. Ground-bait of the cloud variety plus a few

maggots, 3 ft. of greased line from the rod-tip to float made up the assembly. Other baits in reserve were bread-crust, paste, and worms. Time ten o'clock. The preliminaries have been explained in a previous chapter. So I settled down to fish. Having thrown in the ground-bait, I soon saw much movement on the water as the small fry found the particles of floating ground-bait. This was promising, because the small fry attract the larger fish. Followed many nibbles from small fish, till at last the float went under. This resulted in a  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. roach being netted. Other similar fish quickly followed, with one or two small perch, which friend duck eagerly swallowed with apparent relish.

About twelve o'clock there came a lull in the biting. I threw in some more ground-bait, lunched, and then resumed fishing with a change of bait, substituting worms for maggots. This resulted in the capture of a few small perch, to the great satisfaction of friend duck who apparently felt no inconvenience from the spines. Presently the float quivered, ever so gently; I held my strike. Again it quivered: I still held my strike. Then away it went under, in a slanting direction: I struck. I was into a good fish: bore, bore, tug, tug. Releasing the butt from my pole, I brought to the net a tench of about 2 lb. This went into the keep-net, not the duck. Some time elapsed before the next fish was netted; this was a  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. perch. With a change of bait at various intervals, I netted about a score of fish, mostly roach. Towards the evening, and on till dusk I used bread-crust. This brought good results, in the way of  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 lb. roach. Apart from the bait, it was the time when the bigger fish begin to feed. I did not get another tench. I was told that golden tench were in the pond, but they did not take the golden opportunity and sample my bait.

Considering the conditions of the day, I was well satisfied with the day's sport, and so was the duck. On a warmish day and with a more congenial wind, no doubt the sport would have been better, for then the bream and tench would have been more in evidence.

The above is typical still-water fishing, which might be better or worse according to conditions. Although I used the "laying-on" method, fishing just off the bottom with either of the trace dressings I have previously suggested would, no doubt, have been successful, at least with the smaller fish. There was too much tangled growth for "low paternostering," though this method might have brought to net some of the larger fish. From the above account the reader will deduce that October's end is not the best time for pond fishing, that a south-east wind is not the most favourable one, and that a change of bait often brings results.

## CHAPTER IX

### BAITS AT A GLANCE

#### CLASSIFICATION

**Pike.** *Live-bait.* The most successful lures are roach, dace, and gudgeon. Cast in under bank and allow the bait to float down by the side of weed-beds. *Dead Bait.* The same bait may be used, also sprats or minnows.

**Roach.** Maggots, red worms, bread-crust, paste, stewed wheat, pearl barley, water-fleas, hemp, elderberries, tails of lob-worms.

**Gudgeon.** Maggots, red worms.

**Perch.** *Large.* Gudgeon, minnow, lob-worms. *Small.* Red worms.

**Tench.** Red worms, brandlings, paste, maggots.

**Dace.** Maggots, red worms, bread-crust; in the evening, when fly-fishing, Red Palmer and Black Gnat.

**Rudd.** Lob-worms, red worms, maggots, bread-crust.

**Chub.** Most insects, such as caterpillars, crickets, maggots, cheese-paste.

**Bream.** Lob-worms, paste, bread-crust, red worms.

**Carp.** Small boiled potatoes, bread-crust or paste sweetened with honey.

**Eels.** Worms. A large eel will occasionally take a dead or a live bait.

**Grayling.** Red worms, maggots; when fly-fishing, Wickham's Fancy, Bumble, Red Ant, Alder, Autumn Dun.

**Trout.** Most streams have their particular favourite, but the angler should carry Black Gnat, Greenwell's Glory, Wickham's Fancy.

*Wet Fly*.—Alders, Coachman, March Brown, Cock-y-bondhu, Red Palmer.

*Live-bait*.—Minnow, hooked through both lips; red worms and brandlings.

WHEN DAPPING. All kinds of insects, grasshoppers, beetles, bluebottles, moths, house-flies, caterpillars, maggots, caddis, bees.

### PREPARATION OF BAITS

*Gentles or Maggots*. The larvæ of the bluebottle, or blow-fly, one of the most popular baits, which most fish will take. Should be kept in damp sand and in a cool place as they quickly pupate in summer. During the winter-time, they will keep for weeks. They can easily be bred by placing offal under a thin covering of earth; but it is better to purchase them.

*Worms* (Marshworms, Red worms, Brandling). Excellent bait, especially in the Broads district. They should be well scoured by placing in moss before fishing (see p. 126). A wormery is invaluable, especially in the summer months, when at times worms are impossible to get. Dig a shallow hole in a shady corner of the garden and fill it with earth mixed with dead leaves, grass cuttings, vegetable parings and tea leaves. The place should be kept damp.

*Paste*. At times a very killing bait. To prepare, soak a thick slice of white bread, not too wet, and squeeze out the water. Then—when the wife isn't looking—borrow the rolling pin and board and thoroughly roll the damp bread. A little custard-powder may be added, but it is optional. Scrape the flattened bread into a piece of clean linen and squeeze and work it till of the right consistency. It may be coloured by the addition of a few drops of cochineal or saffron. Some anglers, when using

bread paste, prefer to make it by the waterside, because, they say, it acquires the flavour of the water. I don't think there is anything in this; whether it is made by the waterside or at home, it acquires the water's flavour immediately upon entering this element.

*Cheese Paste.* Added to an equal portion of bread paste this makes an excellent chub bait.

*Wheat.* Soak for some hours, then stew over a slow fire till the kernel is swollen and cracks down the centre exposing the white inside.

*Dock (or Docken) Grub.* The larvæ of the ghost moth (*Hepialus humuli*) which feeds at the roots of the dock. One has to dig for it. When the leaves are prematurely turning yellow it is a sign that caterpillars are feeding at the roots. Good for chub and trout.

*Caddis* (Stone fly larvæ). Found among woodwork and gravel on the beds of streams. To extract them from their case-like habitat, which is of bits of wood, tiny grit, and other stream debris, squeeze lightly the tail end; this causes the black head to pop out, enabling the grub to be drawn out of the case. A first-rate bait for chub, roach, dace, and trout.

*Hemp-seed.* A deadly bait, a doubtful legacy of the Belgian soldier-anglers during the war of 1914-18. It should be first of all soaked for a day or so, then slowly boiled till the seed splits, showing the white inside. This generally takes about forty minutes.

*Elderberries.* Generally used with hemp-seed as ground-bait. To preserve them, place in a jar of 40 per cent solution of formalin diluted with water in the proportion of 10 parts water to one of formalin.

*Bread-crust.* Slightly soak the crust, then place it under a heavy weight for a day or two, when it becomes firm and compressed and is then cut into tiny cubes ready for



the hook. Personally I prefer to take a piece of crust in my pack and break it off when I want to use it.

There are many other baits that at times are very acceptable to the fish. Here are a few—

Pearl barley, macaroni, blood-worms, cockchafers, boiled potatoes (for carp), freshwater shrimps, peeled shrimps (especially when the water is near the sea), silkweed from off lock-gates and breakwaters, snails, caterpillars, wood-lice, etc. All may occasionally be tried, for the unorthodox often pays.

### Baiting the Hook

Perhaps a few words on baiting the hook will not be amiss. (Fig. 58.)

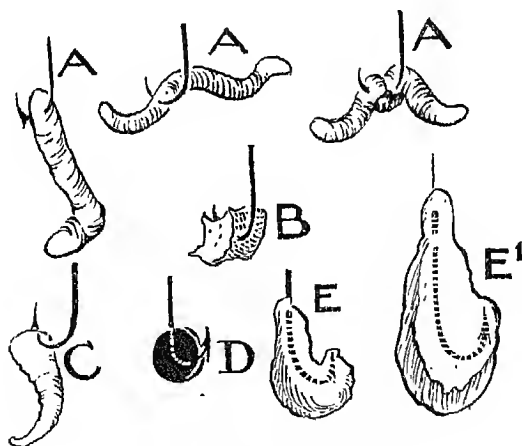


FIG. 58. BAITING THE HOOK

A. Worm.  
B. Cube.

C. Gentle.  
D. Hemp-seed.

E. Paste (small).  
E'. Paste (large).

*Maggots or Gentles.* I know of no grub that has such tenacity of life as this larva of the bluchottle; yet many anglers kill it quickly by the way they place it on the

hook. Even experienced anglers sometimes do this simple thing wrongly. They will pierce the vital parts, almost threading the maggot on to the hook. The result is that the grub is so severely pierced that its internals are quickly washed out, leaving a mere husk on the hook, at which no self-respecting roach would look. By hooking very lightly through the skin at the tail end, the thick end, the grub will keep alive and lively for a surprising long time, in spite of being in water. Four or five lively maggots on a hook make a mighty tempting bait.

*Paste.* It is a mistake to bury the hook in the middle of a large lump of paste, for the fish invariably gets away without a scratch. Nothing less than a No. 9 hook should be used for this bait and the hook point should be near the surface of the bait. This can be ensured by pressing the paste with the thumb till the point of the hook is felt. A large piece can be pressed right up the shank of the hook, but a smaller piece should conform to the shape of the hook.

*Worms, Cubes, and Hemp-seed.* The method of baiting the hook with these will be perhaps more clearly understood by referring to Fig. 58. In the case of hemp-seed, the back of the hook should be pressed into the split of the seed, leaving the point of the hook protruding at *D*.

### **Take No Chances with your Bait**

To be short of bait on a holiday is the worst possible thing that can happen. So on taking a fishing holiday, perhaps in some remote spot, be sure that your bait is adequate for the time you are staying at the place. Leave orders, therefore, with your tackle merchant to send you worms and gentles at intervals of three days. In the hot summer months gentles quickly pupate and worms, unless carefully nursed, soon die.

## Care of Bait

*Worms.* When worms are taken long distances they should be placed in canvas or linen bags containing *damp* moss, and carried on the outside of one's bag. On arriving at the destination, they should at once be seen to. Obtain a large plant-pot and cork or plug the hole in the bottom. This for the duration of your holiday will be the wormery, which must be kept out of doors *in the shade*. First of all, thoroughly damp the moss, afterwards eliminating any superfluous water. Then fill the plant-pot and press down to 2 or 3 in. from the rim. Put each worm in separately, so that, in due course they will work themselves down through the moss, to the bottom of the pot, and in so doing will clean themselves. Finally tie very securely a linen or porous rag over the top of the pot. Every two days or so the pot should be entirely emptied and the same process repeated. Troublesome? Perhaps, but well worth the trouble.

*Maggots.* These should be carried in a perforated tin and carried in damp sand. A lump of ice, if procurable, placed in the tin will prevent them from pupating prematurely. Maggots short of food will turn cannibals, or pupate prematurely; a piece of bacon and some grated cheese will prevent this. Save the pupæ, either for ground-bait or hook-bait. If used as ground-bait, they should be squeezed in the other ground-bait, otherwise they float and are liable to be carried out of the swim, taking the fish with them.

## CHAPTER X

### CONCERNING BITES

How very, very important they are; in fact, they are all-important, for without them there would be no sport on a day of fishing.

I have on occasion sat for hours without a bite, yet always anticipating, ever alert and keen. Nevertheless the sport becomes tedious, even to the most "hard-boiled" of us, when this happens. With the faintest flicker of the float, the beginning of the bite, all enthusiasm returns; forgotten is the weary time of waiting and the day's fishing recommences. Such is the power and fascination of the bite.

Now bites vary according to the fish, the current, the method of fishing, the depth one fishes, and the bait. A bite does not necessarily mean that you will get your fish, for some need the strike of experience and one may strike too soon or too late. It is with these little, but very important, perplexities in mind that this chapter is written. Now let's get down to it.

#### **The Bronze Bream Bite**

Perhaps the most fascinating bite of all, is the flat-float bream bite. There is first of all a faint quivering of the float—*prenez garde!* Then the float starts to rise out of the water, turns over, falls flat, and disappears beneath the surface. Why should these evolutions happen and why are they especially characteristic of the bream? It is because of the anatomy of the fish; its unusual depth is such, that it has more or less to stand (swim) on its head to pick up any bait off the bottom.

Let us refer to Fig. 59. Note particularly the shape of the fish and the distance its mouth is from the ground. The bait is a large lob-worm, and the method of fishing is "laying-on" in still water.

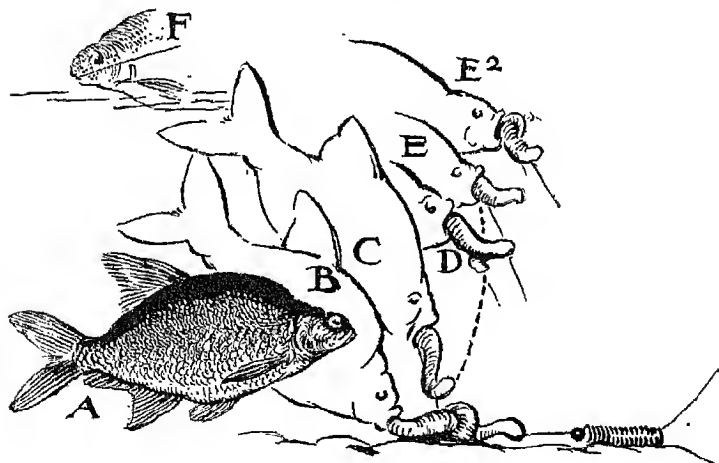
*A* is the swimming fish; it sees the bait and decides that it is good.

*B*. You will notice that the fish has practically to up-end itself to reach the bait; as it mouths it, the float quivers, *B<sub>1</sub>*.

*C*, *D*, *E*, the progressive stages before the fish rights itself.

*C<sub>1</sub>*, *D<sub>1</sub>*, *E<sub>1</sub>* show the reactions to the float.

Not before the fish reaches the position at *E* is the bait, but not always the hook, taken in. By this time, as indicated at *E<sub>1</sub>*, the float is flat upon the water. Now there is much controversy as to when to strike. Many anglers strike at this stage. Sometimes they are successful in engaging the fish, sometimes they are not. I have



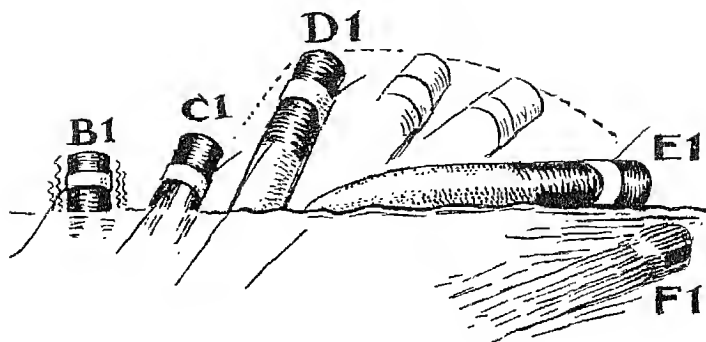


FIG. 59. THE FLAT-FLOAT BREAM BITE

certainly taken fish by striking when the float is at position  $E_1$ , although I have missed them at times. On the other hand, I have no recollection of ever having missed my fish when striking at  $F_1$ . Note  $F$ , the fish has completely taken in the whole of the bait, *including the hook*, and is swimming away, causing the float to disappear. A firm, sweeping strike will engage the fish.  $E_2$  shows what happens when a fish is missed by striking at  $E_1$ . Although nearly all the worm is taken in, the little that is *not* may contain the hook. Therefore, striking would be futile and the angler would merely pull the worm out of the fish's mouth.

So you see there is a risk in striking when the float falls flat. By striking at  $F_1$ , that is, when the float is disappearing, this risk is eliminated. Anyhow, this is my own way and I have taken a few hundredweight of bream in my time. The laying-on method to my way of thinking is by far the most effective method of taking bream. By this method I remember taking over fifty bream one day of fishing, and not in a previously baited swim. Yet, there have been occasions when I have taken smallish

bream when roaching *off* bottom and was greatly surprised because the float did not react according to the recognized bream bite. Yet I don't see how it could, at least to anything like the same extent, for the fish would take the bait on an even keel, so to speak, as at position *A*, and there would be no transitional stages *B*, *C*, *D*.

Now with paste or maggot, the bait would be more quickly "taken in," being of a more compact nature. It is quite possible that you would get your fish at position *E*<sub>1</sub>, but even with this bait I prefer to play safe, for to "scratch a fish," as experience has taught me, is fatal to the swim.

### **Variations of the Bronze Bream Bite**

The vagaries of fishing are such, that one can't be dogmatic about anything connected with it. One gets both pleasant and unpleasant surprises. The unpleasant surprises happen roaching on gossamer tackle, when, being deceived by the bite, one strikes the rock-like resistance of a large bream, instead of the less resisting roach. Frequently one is smashed, especially when laying-on with a tight line.

To avoid such mishaps, especially when bream are known to be about, the angler should cultivate a sideways sweeping strike, almost as if he were feeling for the fish; the contact then is felt more gradually. Even if one misses the first bite, the fish invariably follows up the retreating bait and one feels the second contact in which the fish hooks itself. Whereas in the hard, sharp, upward strike, being very sudden, one is always liable to be smashed when up against an unexpectedly large fish, especially when tight-lining.

The varieties of bites attributable to bream, although

other fish, too, may be responsible for them, are given below—

*The Shake Bite* is just a quivering or shaking of the float as it rises slightly in the water. This may be either roach or tench. Quite recently I took a  $4\frac{1}{2}$  lb. bream on this bite. I was laying-on with a large lob and a tight line, and had previously taken some large roach. Knowing bream to be in the vicinity I struck cautiously and so saved my tackle. A hard strike is rarely necessary, except in long-distance fishing.

*The Dip Bite* occurs mostly in running water. Strike when the float dips.

*The Check Bite*: the float is momentarily checked on its passage downstream.

*The Weaving Bite* dips and travels at the same time. Strike as the float dips.

*The Directional Bite* occurs in still water. The float, without going under the water, travels as if the fish were following the shoal, swimming with the bait in its mouth. Strike as soon as movement is perceived.

### **Silver Bream**

This fish is similar in form to the bronze bream though to a much less degree. The difference is such, that one rarely gets the position *E1*. The bite is very subtle and is rarely pulled under—when laying-on strike at the merest flicker of the float. Sometimes the directional bite occurs.

### **Roach**

With small roach the bite is quick and jerky, of the “grab-and-run” type. This when the bait is off bottom. When laying-on, just one or two downward jerks of the float; these bites rarely mature. On the other hand if



the float quickly disappears without any preliminary warning, an instant strike will engage the fish. The large roach bite more leisurely, the faintest flicker of the float ere it disappears slowly under the surface. Strike instantly for roach.

### **Dace**

Inhabiting running water, as they do, the travelling float just disappears at the bite. The dace bite is sudden and quick and needs an instantaneous strike.

### **Perch**

The strike should be leisurely. The float bobs two or three times and then disappears. Strike now. A too-delayed strike necessitates an unpleasant surgical operation in recovering the hook.

### **Pike**

A longer-delayed strike is necessary when the pike has seized the live-bait. When live-baiting, the bait generally gets panicky on the approach of the pike and there is movement of the float. So do not mistake this for the bite. The bobbing float denotes the seizure of the bait—wait! Then the float starts travelling, disappearing under the water—wait! Now the float is definitely away—a firm dragging strike will engage your fish. When spinning, the fish more or less hooks itself, but a dragging strike will drive the hooks home.

### **Tench**

A leisurely strike is needed. Wait till the float is disappearing. First, there is the faintest movement of the float; this may repeat itself at slight intervals, then the float goes under in a slanting direction—strike now. On many occasions I have watched big tench feeding, both

in captivity and in a wild state. By what I have gathered in observing them, I think tench are rather picky feeders. They will pick up a bait two or three times and eject it, before deciding to swallow it. This may mean that they are not particularly keen on the bait, or perhaps, not hungry; on the other hand, I have seen them take in a lob with one big gulp. It is surprising the size of bait a tench will take and the amount of food they will consume. When "sampling" the bait and ejecting it they do not drop it in the same spot every time, and so they cause the fine adjustment between bait and float to be altered. The bait is perhaps dropped more directly under the float and thereby causes the flat float. Anyhow, the disappearing float is the strike signal.

## Carp

As carp are generally fished for by the low paternoster method, the bite is as described in the section on p. 73 dealing with this method. When "slider-float" fishing the float gives the usual preliminaries before it goes under, though it may fall flat or just glide on the water.

I will give an instance of how the depth of water influences the bite. I was fishing in 3 ft. of water, 25 ft. out, with running tackle and a fairly heavy float and laying-on. The bite was signalled by a sharp dip, then the float fairly streaked across the water. On striking, the fish, having no depth in which to bore, fairly leaped out of the water taking float and trace with it. I caught quite a number of fish and they all reacted in the same way. It was wildly exciting sport.

The above account is a general survey of bites as I have found them.

## CHAPTER XI

### WINTER AND SUMMER FISHING

#### Winter

WHEN the snow lies thick upon the landscape and the trees like white arabesques stand out against the leaden sky, fishing is not so uncomfortable as it may at first seem, provided, of course, that one is suitably clothed. It is only when the north-easter blows across the wintry landscape that

The air bites shrewdly, it is very cold,  
'Tis a nipping and an eager air.

Then Piscator had better stay at home. Also when the thaw sets in and the water is liquid snow, Piscator will find neither sport nor pleasure.

I find that if one's extremities are warm, one is not so conscious of the cold. To protect the feet, two pairs of socks and rubbers should be worn. For the hands, wear thick woollen gloves with a thumb only and terminating in the form of a bag in lieu of fingers; they are then easily slipped on and off. Attached to the wrists of each glove is a cord which hangs round one's neck, so that when the gloves are taken off quickly they are prevented from being dropped on the sodden earth or even into the water.

A flask of hot tea, cocoa, Bovril, or whatever one fancies, should be included in the pack. It is more beneficial to drink a good draught at a time than occasional sips.

Summer swims are, as a rule, not good winter swims, for seasonal changes have taken place. The weeds are no longer in evidence, and the water is deeper and less clear owing to the winter rains. Bream, tench, gudgeon,

barbel, and eels have gone into winter quarters where they will remain till the coming of warmer winds, though occasionally with a rise of temperature an odd tench or bream may be found. After heavy rains the water becomes thickly coloured and the mud, now in suspension, gradually sinking to the bottom, causes the fish to seek more congenial quarters, which are to be found in the shallows. Here the angler, with due regard to the necessity for keeping out of sight, will often fill his keep-net. As the water clears, the fish return to their winter quarters, in the deep water. The reason for this temporary change of habitat is probably that the colour deposits are distasteful to them, or perhaps their food is not so easy to find in the thick deep water. So the angler may assume from this that the thicker the water the shallower his swim should be.

As a rule, rivers in flood give but poor sport, nor is a swift current any better; but less turbulent water is greatly enhanced and such places the angler should seek (see p. 104). After heavy rains worms are washed into the river, and as the water clears they are found by the feeding fish, so at these times the angler will do very well to use worms as his hook-bait. With the disappearance of the weeds upon which most aquatic life lives, the larder of the fish becomes much depleted, and so the angler's lures are readily accepted by the fish, which are in perfect condition. So, provided the angler can stand up to the elements and enjoy the uncomfortable pleasure of winter fishing, this season is, undoubtedly, the best time for coarse fishing.

## Summer

To loll on the bank, full in the face of the effulgent sun, is one of the delights of summer fishing. All the fish

are up and about. Gudgeon, tench, eels, barbel, bream, have come out of their lethargy, although the summer must be well advanced before the bream afford any sport for the angler. The roach, dace, and pike, in the early months are but in poor condition. Tench and perch will give the best sport. It is some time before the deep water gets really warm and so all aquatic life seek the shallows, which are quickly warmed, and in consequence, aquatic life—fish-food—appears quickly and abundantly. Apart from the quest for food, the fish are there to clean themselves and to sport in the congenial environment. So, anglers, do not neglect these shallow swims; but exercise all the caution in approaching them that you have learned from the preceding chapters.

Although the fish are more plentiful, so is their natural food, this, owing to a beneficent Nature, at a time when the fish are lean, flabby, and ravenous after spawning. With this abundance of natural food the angler's lures are not so acceptable as in the lean winter months. So the wise angler puts on a bait that is alive and wriggling, such as caddis, well-scoured red worms, and grubs; he will fish as fine as possible and present his lures in the most natural manner. Inanimate bait, such as paste, is not particularly alluring at this season, although once in early June I had an exceptionally good day on paste, but this was very exceptional; why it was I do not know, the fish must have just fancied pastry. Of course, I am talking of sizable fish, the greedy little ones will take anything, anyhow, and would take rod and all if they were capable.

### **Autumn**

On the approach of autumn the bream will have finished priming and have "gone down." The angler

may now fish in anticipation of their capture. Fish early and late these autumn days. During the heat of the day it is more profitable to recline in a deck-chair and perhaps indulge in forty winks, for at least one can dream of captures.

It is interesting to note that, although some roach are caught during the heat of the day, the larger fish do not



FIG. 60. THE SEPTEMBER STREAM

begin to feed freely until just before dark. Whatever the reason is, the fact remains that, on many of the best waters I have known, large roach are only taken just about dusk. So, my reader, learn from this that your day's fishing does not end till you can no longer see the float. A hot day in summer, under a copper sky, the water scintillating and the fish just under the surface, give but poor promise of sport. But just before the sun breaks through the morning mist and again when the evening's twilight gathers round, you will get fish, and

big fellows too. And these are also the times for bream and tench.

### **Weather Lore**

The angler who waits on the weather in this uncertain climate of ours is going to miss a lot of sport. Though, admittedly, fair days are more pleasant fishing, days of hot sunshine, when it is delightful to loll on the bank and fish lazily, are not necessarily good days for sport; in fact as a rule they are just the reverse. When the fish are to be seen just under the surface of the water, the angler can be pretty sure he is not going to catch them. On these days the fish seem to go off feeding and are mostly sporting themselves. Only in the early morning and towards the evening when the first nocturnal moths appear, can the angler hope for any sport. In fact, during the hot summer day-time, many experienced coarse-fishers do not fish; but in the cool of the evening, sport is invariably good, and any loss of day-time fishing is more than made up.

Strange though it may seem, excepting when the wind is north-east or east, days of elemental strife are invariably good days. I have had my biggest takes of fish when "white horses" have ridden the waves caused by the blustering wind; days of thunder and lightning, yes, and snow and ice. Windy days are good days, but—excepting for pike—an upstream wind is hopeless. Yet in the normally still water of a lake, the wind-lashed water produces excellent sport.

From the above, the main points that emerge are—

A windy day, except when the wind is north-east or east, is a good day for sport.

Wind over still water produces excellent sport.

A strong upstream wind is hopeless, except for pike.

A frosty day is good, but the very best of all is a dull, warm, moist day in autumn.

Below are a few hints on judging the inclination of the day, to warn those who do not wish to brave the elements in the uncomfortable pleasures of fishing and to give warning to the more hardy, so that they can protect themselves against those elements. These old sayings are based on long observations and are almost invariably true.

Men judge by the complexion of the sky  
The state and inclination of the day. (Shakespeare.)

Between one and two you'll see what the day will do.

Red sky at night, shepherd's delight,  
Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning.

A round-topped cloud with flattened base carries  
rainfall in its face.

Rain before seven, clear before eleven.

When the wind is in the south, it blows the bait into  
the fish's mouth.

Trace in the sky the painter's brush,  
The winds around you soon will rush.

The circle of the moon never filled a pond,  
The circle of the sun wets a shepherd,  
The bigger the ring, the nearer the wet.

The sun is getting up his back stays,  
And it is time to look out for bad weather.

If woolly fleeces spread the Heavenly way,  
Be sure no rain disturbs the summer day.

Mists dispersing on the plain  
Scatter away the clouds and rain;  
But when they rise to the mountain-tops,  
They'll soon descend in copious drops.



When hill-tops are shrouded in mist this is nearly always a sign of rain.

The most likely times for rain to set in are between eight and nine a.m., two a.m., and eight and nine p.m.

Swallows flying high indicate fair weather.

Birds flying low and their chirping easily heard signify coming rain.

A pale and watery sunset heralds rain.

### **Buchan's Weather**

Dr. Alexander Buchan, who died in 1907, was a distinguished Scottish meteorologist. He was the first man to observe that during every year there are six set periods when there is a sharp drop in temperature. He reported upon these periods, and so regularly do they occur that the phrase "a Buchan cold spell" has become an everyday expression. The periods are 7th to 10th February, 11th to 14th April, 9th to 14th May, 29th June to 4th July, 6th to 11th August, and 6th to 12th November. He also observed certain periods when the temperature rises, these being 12th to 15th July, 12th to 15th August, and 3rd to 9th December. It is as yet unknown what causes the recurrence of the Buchan periods.

### **CONDITIONS**

"Conditions" is a very comprehensive term. It means temperature, wind, colour of water, atmosphere; these are the elemental conditions. It also means current, growth of weeds, nature of the water's bed; all these applicable to the swim.

There are certain temperatures which are either too high or too low that cause the fish to go off feeding. If below 30° F. and above 63° F. there is little likelihood

of much sport. Too much heat reduces aeration. This is borne out by increased activity of the fish after a freshening summer shower, and by the fact that on a hot summer's day the fish only feed, to any extent, in the early morning and cooler evening. Excessive cold brings about torpor.

A winter or so ago I arrived at a lake-side to find the grasses white, the water with a thin covering of ice, and only the tree-tops visible above the morning mist. It was a day in February, cold but fair, with a luminous sky in the east, promising sunshine and warmth. This decided me to carry on with my fishing. I broke the ice to make a swim, knowing that at about noon, with a rise in temperature, I should catch fish; and this came about.

It was interesting to observe the awakening of fish-life. As the sun broke through the morning mist and the ice thawed with the gradual rise in temperature, V-shapes appeared in the wake of little fish sporting in the warmth of the surface water. Then bubbles appeared, both from the escaping gases and from the probing fish—I had thrown in my ground-bait. Then followed big rings of rising fish. Almost on the stroke of twelve came the first flicker of the float. Then down it went. Sport from now onwards was good, till I had netted about a score of fish. Came four o'clock with the creeping mist and increasing cold. The sun no longer shone and with the lowering temperature, star shapes of ice began to form at the margin of the mere. *The biting ceased.* So I sought a nearby café to thaw.

## Wind

I have never heard a scientific explanation as to why the fish go "off" when the wind blows cold from the east, especially in winter. Most authorities get over the question by saying that "it brings about adverse conditions."

Quite! This is no doubt satisfactory to the angler who is not particularly interested in the scientific side of fishing. So we will leave it at that.

### **Colour of Water**

Lack of sport in thickly coloured water may be caused by increased food in the colouring matter or inability on the fishes' part to see the lures. Whichever it is, the fact remains that mud in suspension is hopeless for fishing. As soon as the water begins to clear the fish begin to feed, or shall we say bite. At this time worms are an excellent bait.

### **The Atmosphere**

Misty muggy days are good days. Bright sunny days are not so good. Once on a fishing day at the Metropolitan Water Board's reservoir I arrived on an autumn morning to find the landscape enveloped in mist. I had wonderful sport. About ten o'clock, a party of M.W.B. employees arrived to take part in a fishing match. By this time the mists had cleared and the sun shone brightly. The anglers did not catch a fish between them, nor did I get any fish after the mist lifted.

### **Swim Conditions**

The elemental conditions being right, the swim conditions resolve into the matter of technique in fishing them. For instance, if there is a strong growth of weeds on the bottom laying-on would be futile, and, to a certain extent, so would ground-baiting, especially if the weeds are tall, say about 1 ft. or 18 in. high. The ground-bait would sink into the weeds and would have little or no attraction value. Under these circumstances the angler would be compelled to fish above the weeds. Such a

swim would be ideal for hemp-fishing. The same would apply to a soft mud bottom, the bait sinking into the mud, especially worm, or, if paste, becoming mud-coated.

### **Current**

The rate of the current determines the amount of shotting on the trace. The faster the current the more shotting is required. It also determines where the ground-bait should be thrown in—the swifter the current the greater the distance above the swim.

### **Depth**

If the water is very deep a slider-float will be necessary. Deep swims are good swims and are likely to produce bigger fish.

The above is the meaning of conditions as experience has taught me they affect the fish. With regard to the angler, whether it be too hot or too cold is a matter of personal opinion.

## CHAPTER XII

### HINTS FROM LONG EXPERIENCE

#### **The Mistakes Beginners Make**

WE learn by our mistakes, providing, of course, that we are conscious of these mistakes. But let the beginner begin his fishing adventures fully conscious of the errors he is liable to make, so that he may start, at least, with the knowledge of what not to do.

First and foremost, the would-be angler must learn that *fish are wild and shy creatures*. With so many enemies to avoid, both under and above the water, their fight for existence never ceases; consequently, *anything they are not familiar with is a menace*. What more so than *the angler with his rod, assembling his tackle at the very edge of the water* where he hopes to catch fish? By the time he is ready to start fishing, there is not, in all probability, a fish within fifty yards of him. He throws in his ground-bait and *still standing by the water's edge*, casts in his line, *without plumbng the depth*. Time passes and there is no response to his lures. Follows more ground-bait, and after a time, not being very patient, he comes to the conclusion that he has chosen a poor swim. So he moves on. *With the same procedure*, he tries another swim, *lifting his line out every two minutes or so*. Finally he puts his rod on the bank and goes for a stroll, *paying a visit to a solitary angler*, unconscious of the fact that *he is not welcome and is disturbing his fellow-angler's swim*. He remarks that "there is not much doing," but not being given much encouragement in his efforts to make conversation, he strolls back to his rod. His enthusiasm is waning and

he is discouraged, so he flops on the bank and just loafs, with little or no interest in his fishing.

This is a procedure I have witnessed, oh, so many times. The whole process is wrong right from the beginning.

### **It Has Happened to Me**

Experienced and successful anglers are not good conversationalists when fishing. Nor do they wish to be, in fact they very much resent any effort, however well-meaning, to make them so. Even to approach their swims is a *faux pas*. The very footfalls of a passer-by are disturbing to the fishing and it is only politeness which prevents anglers from expressing their thoughts. In approaching the swim, the visitor, quite unconsciously, defeats any camouflage the angler is using. It is really most annoying to be so interrupted. Beginners please note this: to approach an angler and lift his keep-net out of the water to ascertain how many fish he has caught, is the height of impertinence.

### **Do's and Don'ts**

As prevention is better than cure, I will set down a few do's and don'ts.

When fishing from a fixed spot, as in laying-on, do not stand up to fish, to land a fish or to cast. Remember your presence is always a menace to the fish.

Don't fish with your back to the sun; your shadow on the water will scare the fish.

Don't throw in a lot of ground-bait and leave the swim when there has been no immediate response. In due course the fish will find it.

Don't travel light at your fellow-angler's expense.

Don't approach a fellow-angler's swim uninvited, and never fish less than 20 yds. from another angler.

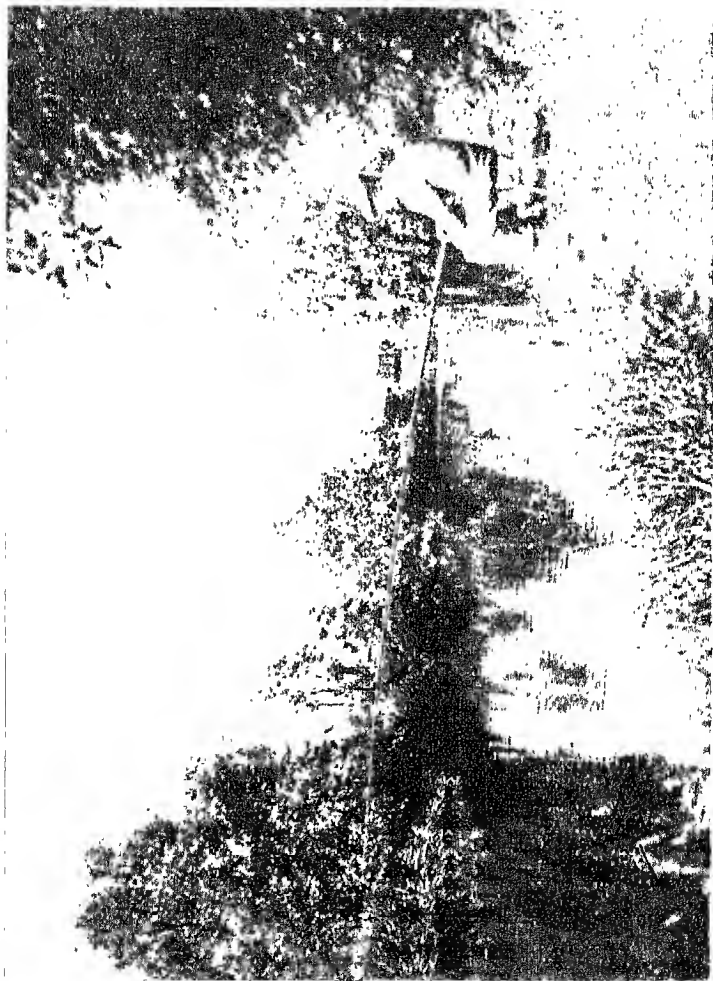


FIG. 61. THE AUTHOR AT KIRKLEY FEN

Don't over-ground bait, especially when using hemp.

Remember, the less movement on the bank the longer the fish will remain in the swim.

Keep the fish under water when bringing it to the bank.

Always bring the fish to the net, never the net to the fish.

Don't pull your line out every five minutes or so; remember every movement is a menace.

Return all unwanted fish to the water, handling the fish gently.

Shut gates, and don't break down trees.

Don't leave litter.

Always use a landing-net to lift a large fish out of the water. This prevents undue strain on the top joint, as well as the risk of a smash or of the fish getting off. To bring the fish in almost to the bank and then jerk it on to the grass is the very essence of bad fishing and the risk is very great, both of losing the fish and of breaking the line. Never let the fish splash its way to the bank on being hooked; it can be brought in almost without a ripple if kept under the water. It is kinder to the fish and does not scare the fish left in the swim.

Do not return fish to the swim. Either put them in the keep-net or take them lower down the stream when they can be returned to the water without disturbing the swim. A scared fish—fish are more scared than hurt when hooked—will take

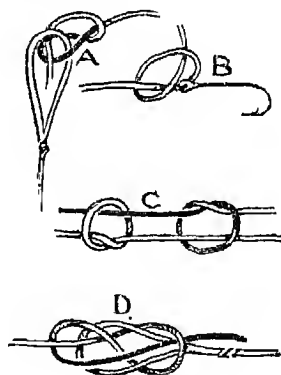


FIG. 52. JOINING AND TYING

A. Attaching hook-link to line.

B. Attaching eyed hook to gut.

C. Joining two pieces of gut.

D. Figure-of-eight knot for attaching cast to line.



others with it in its hurry to get away on being released.

Be methodical both in packing and unpacking your tackle: "a place for everything and everything in its place" is good advice. Much tackle is lost through careless packing and slipshod methods.

Do not wander along the bank, leaving tackle, such as bait-cans, nets, etc., at intervals along the bank; sooner or later they will be forgotten.

### **A Pike Comes into the Swim**

It frequently happens when a successful time is being had with the roach that, for no apparent reason, the biting suddenly "goes off." Why? There may be several reasons, but the two most likely ones are that the fish have ceased feeding or that a jack has come into the swim.

In the former case, if the angler has been catching fish on-and-off all day, the few remaining fish in the swim, alarmed at the disappearance of their brethren, become suspicious and move off. As a rule, when the fish have been feeding most of the day, they cease biting in any case towards the approach of evening. But it is possible that, attracted by the feeding fish in the ground-baited swim, a jack may have approached. This is more than likely, for it frequently happens, especially when fishing in the vicinity of weeds, or when small tributaries run into the main stream. The angler will do very well to go after this intruder, for he may be sure he will catch no more roach till it is removed. He should cautiously step back from the swim and rearrange his trace, substituting a paternoster; if he does not happen to have one with him, an impromptu one is easily fashioned. Place a No. 6 hook, preferably attached to gimp, on a length of stout gut at the end of which is tied a lead bullet or, failing this, even the plummet. The hook-link is placed

on the trace about 18 in. above the lead which is on the bottom. Discard the roach float and attach the trace to the line. From the keep-net the angler then takes a small roach for bait, hooks it through both lips and casts into the swim as in his previous fishing. If there is a pike in the swim the response will be almost immediate. For the pike, obviously, approached the swim to feed and he will. Keep the line taut. If things are as we surmise, the first indication of the pike's presence will be a shaking of the line, then the rod top bends. The fish has seized the bait. Allow him a half minute or so, according to the size of the bait, then strike firmly, to drive the hook home. The struggling fish will denote his capture, so keep the line taut and bring it to the net.

After so much disturbance in the swim, it will be some time before any fish will return to it. So the angler will, for a time, fish another swim.

If there has been no response to the pike-lure after twenty minutes or so, the angler may assume that either there is no pike or it has moved on. He will then carry on with his roaching according to his inclinations and the time of the day.

### **The Sense of Smell in Fish**

When occasionally mixing flavoured custard-powder with my bait-paste, I have been mindful of the sense of smell in fishes. This is the extent of my use of scented baits, though there have been occasions when a fellow-angler has said "Try this" and offered me some scented bait. When using such bait, I don't know that my fishing has been improved, but at any rate it has not deteriorated. The subject is debatable. Yet the sense of smell, to a greater extent than is commonly supposed, plays a part in the fish's acceptance of the bait.

In support of this, let me quote the following case. I was fishing with a friend on one occasion when he was using bran and middlings from a long-forgotten tin. Although we were fishing barely 6 yds. apart I was catching fish and my friend was not even getting a bite. After I had caught about a dozen fish to his none, my friend began to suspect a reason for this state of affairs. Chancing to smell his ground-bait he found it was *sour*. He asked me to smell it. Yes, it was definitely very sour. The sourness of this ground-bait had obviously driven the fish out of his swim. There was no other reason for it, for the swim had always yielded fish and my friend was an experienced angler. However, he moved higher up, borrowed some of my ground-bait, and began to catch fish. So the fish's sense of smell had caused them to reject the hook-bait which was contaminated by his hands which had been handling his ground-bait.

I think that some fish have this sense of smell more developed than others. Take tench, eels, bream, carp, mostly bottom-feeders, and largely night- or dusk-feeders; they must feed by sense of smell, for there can be little or no light at the bottom in the dusk or dark. A worm on the bottom in the dark cannot possibly be a very conspicuous object, therefore they must feed by the sense of smell. Other fish also feed when there is little or no light; again the sense of smell must be employed.

But to return to scented bait, I think the natural scent of whatever bait is used is a determining factor in the acceptance of the bait.

### **Sight in Fish**

Tench and eels I am sure have very poor sight. One has only to look at the size of the eyes compared with the

more surface-feeding fish, and the fact that they feed more in the dusk and the dawn supports this theory. I have known big tench swim by within a foot of my feet as I have sat fishing. This is hardly in the nature of things had they keen vision.

## CHAPTER XIII

### SHOULD UNDERSIZED FISH BE RETURNED TO THE WATER?

#### **A Controversy**

SOME time ago, under the above heading, there appeared in the *Fishing Gazette* two letters, one from a correspondent, Mr. X, advocating that these fish should not be returned and one from myself insisting that they should. With the future of fishing in mind, I republish the main points of Mr. X's letter and my answer. The intelligent reader, in his own interests and in those of future anglers, will read and judge for himself.

*Mr. X.* "Fish should not be returned. Fishing was better forty years ago, when anglers killed every fish they took."

*Answer.* "This question intrigues me very much. For years I have been waging war against the callous wastage of fish-life, and I cannot let pass that which threatens to undo what success I have achieved in this campaign. I agree that fishing was better forty years ago, but not for the reason Mr. X suggests. The chief reason was that there were comparatively few anglers in those days and fish were far more plentiful; motors, motor-cycles, and motor-coaches were unknown, so that out of the way waters were unfished. For every angler then, there are a hundred, nay, perhaps a thousand, now. Tackle then was not of the same excellence as now. There were no mechanical aids and none of the monetary awards which have added thousands to the ranks of Piscators. When I see the crowds out for a fishing-match, anglers at short intervals of space on a six-miles front, I marvel that there

are any fish left. The fact is, there are as many, if not more, fishermen than fish. Roughly, I myself average about a thousand fish per season. In ten days' fishing last season I netted three hundred and fifty fish. There are something like a million anglers in this country and with the introduction of hemp-seed as a bait, enabling even small boys to catch bags of undersized fish, think how great the toll of fish-life must be. Probably 80 per cent of the captured fish are not sizable. Does Mr. X advocate destroying these fish? I return practically all my fish—coarse fish. If every angler killed all his captures, it is not difficult to imagine that, in a very short time, there would be little fishing worth while. Even as it is and in spite of the laws against undersized fish, most of the good fishing is only to be had in private or club waters, which are *stocked*. This speaks for itself. Years ago, the River Lee was a famous water, where wonderful takes of fish could be had. Nowadays, any free fishing in this river is hardly worth while. I have watched, year by year, the deterioration of this fine river, and I definitely say it started with the introduction of hemp-seed. I have seen unwanted fish callously thrown on the bank to die, a most ghastly practice. I have seen pillow-slips full of fish to be sold to the Jewish market. I have seen bait-cans loaded to suffocation-point with small fish to be sold as live-bait. Here we have the mercenary element which destroys all sport."

Mr. X. "If all these small fish were thrown in dead [Pure River Society, forward] they would produce shrimps and snails [*largely vegetable feeders*] which in turn would be eaten by the inexperienced fish." [*Italics mine.*]

Answer. "*Pollution would set in long before any shrimps or snails were produced.* The dead fish would more likely become the habitat of dipterous larvæ. I have

experienced this in the fish-pond in my garden. Whilst on holiday, one of my large fish died. I found it, on my return, a putrid mass, seething with dipterous larvæ, and the stench was so vile that I felt sick for days afterwards. The water was stagnant and all the fish poisoned. Imagine every angler throwing in dead fish."

*Mr. X.* "The few remaining fish would quickly repopulate the river."

*Answer.* "Few! Quickly! How long does Mr. X think it takes for a fish to grow sizeable? What about the angling whilst the fish are growing up? Apart from the devastation of fish by man, Nature takes an even greater toll. In the water, predaceous fish, such as pike, trout, perch, and eels feed on the ova and the fish. Above water, herons, grebes, diving ducks, cormorants, and otters take a heavy toll. I could say much more, but little as I have said, it surely points out the fallacy of the practice Mr. X well-meaningly suggests."

### Size of Fish that may be Retained

The sportsman angler will not retain undersized fish; those who do are liable to be prosecuted and turned away permanently from any water where the law of undersized fish is in force. For the angler's guidance I give below the sizes of fish that may be retained. These sizes are for the Thames and Lee where I mostly fish, but they are practically the same for most waters.

THAMES		LEE	
Roach, 8 in.	Pike, 18 in.	Roach, 7 in.	Pike, 18 in.
Rudd, 8 in.	Perch, 9 in.	Rudd, 7 in.	Perch, 8 in.
Dace, 7 in.	Barbel, 16 in.	Dace, 6 in.	Barbel, 16 in.
Chub, 12 in.	Trout, 12 in.	Chub, 10 in.	Trout, 12 in.
Bleak, 4 in.	Grayling, 12 in.	Bleak, 4 in.	Grayling, 9 in.
Bream, 12 in.	Gudgeon, 5 in.	Bream, 10 in.	Gudgeon, 4 in.
Tench, 10 in.	Carp, 12 in.	Tench, 8 in.	Carp, 10 in.

Fish that may be retained on Yorkshire rivers: AIRE, OUSE, DERWENT, YARE, SWALE, WHARFE, NIDD—

Barbel, 12 in.		Dace	
Bream	} 9 in.	Perch	} 7 in.
Chub		Roach	
Grayling		Rudd	
Tench			

The Norfolk Fishery Board's water—

Pike, 21 in.		Roach	
Bream	} 8 in.	Rudd	} 6 in.
Carp		Dace	
Tench			
Perch			

The length is measured from the nose to the fork of the tail.

For Norfolk waters a rod-and-line licence is necessary for all persons over fourteen years. For one year or part of a year, 2s. For one day, 6d. These licences may be obtained at Post Offices or hotels in riverside villages.

*The Trent Fishery District.* Licences are also required for TRENT, IDLE, SOAR, WREAK, DERWENT, WYE, and DOVE. 1s. a year for freshwater fishing. Boys under seventeen, 6d. Four-day licences, 6d. For trout-fishers a trout licence is necessary.

### Close Season for Coarse Fish

15th March to 15th June, both dates inclusive.

### Close Season for Game Fish

THAMES. 11th September to 31st March, when worms may be used.

LEE. The same.

TRENT. 2nd October to 15th March.

SEVERN AND TRIBUTARIES. 2nd October to 2nd April.

YORKSHIRE RIVERS. 2nd October to 1st April.

BROADS DISTRICT. 30th September to 1st March.



The visiting angler to strange waters should always, before commencing his fishing, make inquiries as to whether any fees are required to fish them. Club waters may, as a rule, be fished on the payment of a small sum. Most clubs issue day tickets. But where the notice "Private Fishing" appears anglers must respect this.

On being granted the privilege of fishing a club water the angler must conform to the rules of the club, and he should not leave litter, break down trees or bushes, or leave gates open. Otherwise he will not again be granted the privilege of fishing the water.

## APPENDIX

### GLOSSARY OF FISHING TERMS

**Bottom fishing.** When angling for coarse fish, with the bait beneath the surface or on the bottom.

**Butt.** Bottom joint of the rod. Also termed Base.

**Cast.** To throw out.

**Cast.** That portion of the line from rod-tip to float.

**Close season.** For coarse fish, a period between 15th March to 15th June, both dates inclusive, when the fish are spawning.

For trout, 1st March to 30th September, both dates inclusive.

**Creel.** Old-fashioned term for fishing-basket.

**Disgorger.** A bone or metal implement notched at one end, to remove hook from the fish when too far down its throat to be released by the fingers.

**Flight.** Cast or trace used with spinning tackle.

**Float.** Used in nearly every form of coarse fishing to suspend the bait in the water and to show when the fish are biting.

**Gag.** Implement used for keeping open the jaws of pike when removing hooks.

**Gentles.** Maggots, the larvæ of the blow-fly. A popular bait.

**Ground-bait.** Bait composed of bread, bran, middlings, maggots, worms, etc., thrown into the water to attract the fish before fishing.

**Hook-link.** The portion of the gut to which the hook is attached.

**Hemp-seed.** A hook-bait introduced by the Belgians during the 1914-18 war. Its use is highly controversial.

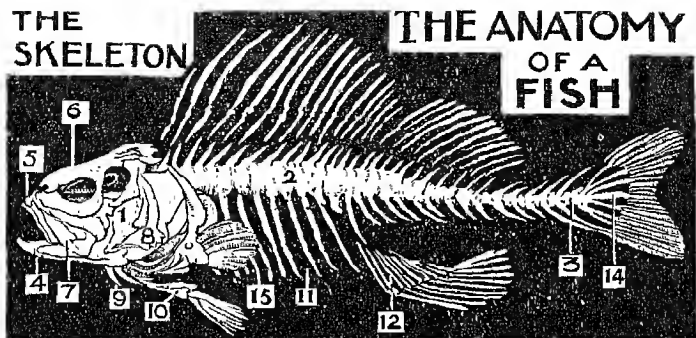
**Jack.** A small pike.

**Keep-net.** A cage-like net suspended in the water during fishing so as to keep alive any fish captured.

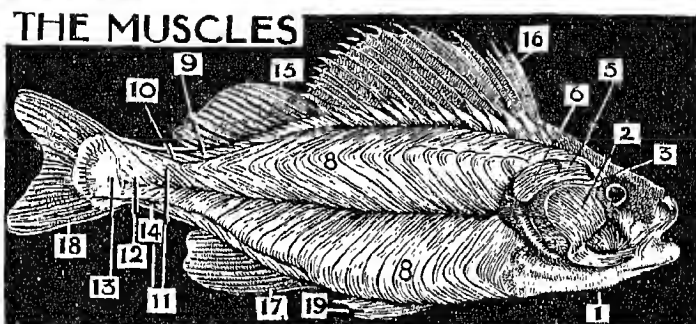
**Landing-net.** A net at the end of a wooden shaft, for lifting the fish out of the water when the angler has brought it within reach.

**Laying-on.** Another term for Ledgering.

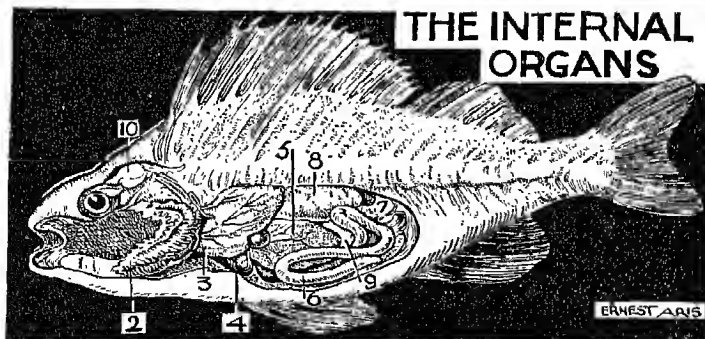
## THE SKELETON



## THE MUSCLES



## THE INTERNAL ORGANS



**Ledgering.** Fishing with the bait stationary on the bottom of the river or lake.

**Paternoster.** Tackle for suspending the bait in mid-water, particularly live-bait.

**Plummet.** A conical metal weight ringed at the top with a piece of cork let in at the base, used for testing the depth of the water.

**Rise.** When the fish break the surface of the water to take fly.

**Rod-rests.** Two short iron or wooden rods, one V-shaped at the tip and one hooked, used in holding the rod over the water.

**Run.** When a pike seizes the bait and is moving off.

**Scriper.** A cockney term for a small fish.

**Smashed.** When the fish breaks the tackle.

**Spoon.** A spinning lure for pike.

**Striking.** The act of driving home the hook when the fish has seized the bait.

**Swim.** The portion of the river or lake the angler is fishing.

### FIG. 63. THE ANATOMY OF A FISH THE SKELETON

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Skull.               | 9 Branchiostegal rays. |
| 2 Abdominal vertebrae. | 10 Pelvic bones.       |
| 3 Caudal vertebrae.    | 11 Ribs.               |
| 4 Lower jaw.           | 12 Interhæmal bones.   |
| 5 Premaxillary.        | 13 Interneural bones.  |
| 6 Cranium.             | 14 Hypural bones.      |
| 7 Maxillary.           | 15 Pectoral fin.       |
| 8 Opercular bones.     | 16 Pectoral arch.      |

### THE MUSCLES

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 Mandibular portion of adductor mandibulae. | 10 Lateralis superficialis.                  |
| 2 Cephalic portion of adductor mandibulae.   | 11 Dorsal tendon of lateralis superficialis. |
| 3 Levator arcus palatini.                    | 12 Terminal tendons of lateralis profundus.  |
| 4 Dilator operculi.                          | 13 Interfilamenti caudalis.                  |
| 5 Part of great lateral muscle.              | 14 Ventral slip of lateralis.                |
| 6 Levator operculi.                          | 15 Soft dorsal fin.                          |
| 7 Inclinator dorsalis.                       | 16 Spinous dorsal fin.                       |
| 8 Great lateral muscle.                      | 17 Anal fin.                                 |
| 9 Lateralis profundus.                       | 18 Caudal fin.                               |
|  | 19 Pelvic fin.                               |

} Fins.

### THE INTERNAL ORGANS

- |            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| 1 Tongue.  | 6 Intestines.  |
| 2 Gills.   | 7 Kidney.      |
| 3 Liver.   | 8 Air bladder. |
| 4 Heart.   | 9 Testis.      |
| 5 Stomach. | 10 Brain.      |

**Tight-corking.** Or tight-lining, a method of fishing with the float and line in a straight line downstream below the rod. Similar to ledgering, with or without float.

**Topping.** A short length of line added to the gut in order to attach the line to the rod when using the roach-pole.

**Trace.** The portion of the line below water.

**Trotting.** Swimming the float downstream with the bait just touching bottom.



FIG. 64. KLEP-NET.

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